

Understanding Revelation – Topic 3

# **The Church in the wilderness**

**The outstanding story  
of the saints in Thyatira**

**An exposition of Revelation Chapter 2:18-29**

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## Background

### ***And to the angel of the church of Thyatira write ...***

Thyatira is the fourth of the seven churches of Revelation. It spans the period of the popular church within the Roman Empire from Constantine the Great (approximately 300-538 AD) to the church of the Reformation period (after 1500 AD). This period embraced the Middle and Dark Ages when the Papacy dominated Europe. The true church was only able to survive "in the wilderness".

This was the central era of the period of the seven churches. In all, twelve verses of scripture are employed to describe this epoch, compared to an average 6.5 verses used to describe each of the eras of the other six churches. The tribulations of the Church of Thyatira also cover the longest and the most trying period of the Christian era.

## Significance of Christ's title

### ***...These things says the Son of God...***

This is the only use of *Son of God* in Revelation: generally the term used in this context is *Son of man*. The term *Son of God* emphasizes Christ's deity. In this period Christ's position and prerogatives were usurped by the great Antichrist who had *seated himself in the temple (church) of God showing himself that he is God*. (2 Thessalonians 2:4.) The Son of God had been replaced by the *son of perdition*: the Man of Sorrows by *the man of sin*.

### ***...who has eyes like a flame of fire...***

His all-penetrating gaze detects both the good and the evil that men do. The evil He detects He will both judge and destroy utterly.

### ***...and his feet like fine brass... v18***

In Revelation 1:15 this expression is shown to represent the treading down in judgment of all who choose sin and rebellion.<sup>1</sup> This description was particularly relevant to this period of the church when the saints of God suffered so unjustly at the hands of the Antichrist.

Where was the true church of God during this period? This was the church described in Revelation 12 as having *fled into the wilderness* (vs 6 & 14). Consequently it was not the orthodox, publicly recognized, professedly Christian church. During that period the recognized church was the Church of Rome and while there may have been a few true servants of God within this church, it was not Christ's church.

The Church of Rome was represented by the woman of Revelation 17, arrayed in purple and scarlet. Thyatira's first convert was Lydia, a seller of purple (Acts 16:12-14). Thyatira was, and still is, noted for its production of purple and scarlet cloth. The church

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<sup>1</sup> A.P. Cooke, *Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega*, 2nd ed. (Sydney, Self-published, 1985), See Appendix B.

addressed under *Thyatira* was a church in opposition to the organization led by purple and scarlet clad ecclesiastics. Those comprising the true church in this period consisted of various groups, some of whom were isolated, having fled to the wilderness regions of the then-known world.

During the reign of the Emperor Justinian, non-Catholics were compelled by law to become Catholics or have their land and goods confiscated and suffer exile from the empire. As a result, those of the true Christian faith forsook their homes and, in 538 AD<sup>2</sup>, left the so-called civilized areas of the Roman Empire, suffering persecution, including massacres, along the way. Except for the Church of the East, from this time on, the true church existed only as scattered groups of believers.

These scattered groups included the Celtic Christians of the British Isles, the Paulicians of Armenia, the Ethiopians of Africa, the original Waldenses of eastern Spain,<sup>3</sup> the Waldenses of North Italy, the Albigenses of Southern and Western France, the Lollards of England and the Hussites of Bohemia. Benedict's history states

*Whenever therefore... the terms Berengarians, Petrobrusians, Henricians, Arnoldists, Waldenses, Albigenses, Leonists or the Poor Men of Lyons, Lollards, Cathari, etc occur, it must be understood that they intend a people who agreed in certain leading principles, however they might differ in some smaller matters, and that all of them were by Catholics comprehended under the general name of Waldenses.*<sup>4</sup>

## The Celtic church

### Ireland

The evidence suggests that the Christian faith first entered Britain via the Galatians or Gauls - a segment of the Celtic race - who were converted to Christ by the apostle Paul. The most memorable man in Ireland's ecclesiastical history was St Patrick (360 AD). He commenced his ministry in about 390 AD and in 411 AD he was at the height of his remarkable career. Patrick founded many schools and colleges in Ireland. His Bible was the Latin Itala version, the same as the Waldensian Bible: it was a translation from Lucian's manuscripts, later called *The Textus Receptus*.<sup>5</sup> The Bible schools developed into large universities and the church in Ireland was splendidly organized. The most famous Celtic centers of learning were at Armagh, Clonmacnoise, Clonard and Bangor. At Armagh over 7000 students attended at the one time. So famous did Ireland become that it was called *The Land of Saints and Scholars*. All these educational centers were based upon the Bible. Ireland led the world in the civilizing of mankind during this era.

In 430 AD Pope Celestine interposed Bishop Palladius as a bishop to the Irish but he was shown such disdain that he soon withdrew in disappointment.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Bower, *The History of the Popes* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1749), 334.

<sup>3</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 1995), 207-208.

<sup>4</sup> D. Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America* (Boston: Lincoln and Edmands, 1813), 1:112-113.

<sup>5</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 84-85.

*The marvelous educational system of the Celtic church, revised and better organized by Patrick, spread successfully over Europe until the Benedictine system, favoured by the Papacy and reinforced by the state, robbed the Celtic church of its renown and sought to destroy all records of its educational system.<sup>6</sup>*

The Celtic church continued undisturbed in Ireland until 832 AD when Ireland was invaded by the Danes. These invaders attacked and destroyed many educational centers, which brought much of the church to ruin. Unfortunately, over time the Danes accepted the Catholic form of Christianity. Through this channel the Papacy entered Ireland and began to systematically destroy the Celtic church. By the time the Danes were expelled from the island in 1014 AD the Irish were enmeshed in Catholicism.

The final blow to the Irish Celtic church occurred when Pope Adrian IV issued a Bull authorizing Henry II of England to invade Ireland. This invasion in 1171 AD aided the Latin clergy to rid Ireland of its faithful Celtic pastors.

*When Henry II ruined both the political and the ecclesiastical independence of Ireland he also destroyed the valuable records which would clarify the inner spiritual life and evangelical set-up of the Celtic church in the days of Patrick. Even this however did not have force enough to blur or obscure the glorious outburst of evangelical revival and learning which followed the work of Patrick.<sup>7</sup>*

## **Wales**

After the Romans withdrew from Britain, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded (449 AD). These Gothic invasions of the Western Empire were critical to the establishment of the Celtic church in Wales. The Goths drove the Britons and their Celtic church westward where it remained vigorous.<sup>8</sup>

By 538 AD the Celtic church in Wales was led by Dinooth (530-610). However in 597 AD Pope Gregory I sent Augustine and 200 monks to Kent to establish the Catholic faith. The way had been prepared by the arranged marriage of a Frankish Roman Catholic princess to the King of Kent. It was then that Augustine, established a Catholic Church in the province which was Christian in name only. After the king died, the so-called Christian Catholics lapsed back into paganism. However other strategic marriages were arranged at this time by Rome whereby the Papacy was able to resist the advances of the Celtic church among the English population.

Up to this time, the center of the Celtic church in Britain was at Bangor in North Wales. The college there was so large that it was separated into seven divisions, each division containing at least 300 young men, implying at least 2000 students. It was from Bangor that the famous Columbanus and his 13 companions ventured forth to the continent of Europe to spread the Celtic faith.

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<sup>6</sup> B. Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the making of Britain* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1921), in Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant*, 90.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 95-96.

<sup>8</sup> It is from this period that the legend of King Arthur emerged. Tradition claims that he was the defender of the Celtic church against the Anglo-Saxons who were settling in Britain.

The learned Dinooth was the Celtic leader who headed the Celtic delegation in the confrontation with Augustine. This confrontation revealed how much at variance the Celtic faith was with apostate Romanism. In the aftermath, because of the refusal of the Celtic church leaders to submit to Rome, King Aethelfrith of Northumbria attacked the Britons and slew 1200 young Celtic ministerial students praying nearby.

Nevertheless the Celtic church continued to grow in Wales, independent of the Saxon kingdom to the east until the time of the Norman invasion in 1066. William of Normandy was the Papal instrument who opposed and ultimately neutralized the work of the Celtic church.

*Little by little however, by intrigue, by flatteries, by threats, supported at every turn by England's armed power and seconded by the strong papal influences in Italy and France, the Papal clergy succeeded after seven centuries in obtaining the mastery.* <sup>9</sup>

The Celtic church finally disappeared as an organization under Henry VIII. However it is claimed that there were underground remnants of the true faith that held fast until the Protestant Reformation came to Britain.

## Scotland

The gospel was first taken to Scotland by Colomba (531-607 AD), an Irish prince who was a member of St Patrick's church; a product of the Celtic faith's educational system, which was then the best in the world.

Colomba's family clan, situated in north-east Ireland, had conquered a large section of Western Caledonia. As a consequence, with 200 associates, Colomba established a college on the Isle of Iona, off the western Scottish coast. From there it derived the name Scotia or Scotland. Iona became a remarkable center of learning and evangelical labour that has made it famous for evermore. In their studies the Italic version of the Bible was used and candidates required eighteen years of study before they could be ordained.

The Iona missionaries pioneered the gospel among the Picts of Caledonia and the Saxons of England. They were also involved in establishing the Celtic church on the Continent.

*The Irish Scottish churches covered the British Isles and the continent of Europe with their thousands of missionary centers in a short period. The Celtic saints pushed their way southward into the promontories of Kintyre; to western isles... to northern Scotland...Caithness, Sutherland and Ross. As early as the middle of the seventh century, or about one hundred years after the founding of Iona, several large and influential mission schools had sprung up in the British Isles.* <sup>10</sup>

Colomba labored in Scotland for 34 years. All told, Iona was a missionary center for 641 years until it was destroyed by the Benedictine monks. The Celtic Christians were scattered and by about 740 AD some of the pastors had apostatized. Yet as late as 1058 AD the Celtic church was still independent and in the main, in harmony with the teachings of the Iona founders.

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<sup>9</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 164.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-109.

In 1130 a final blow fell when the Scottish Celtic clergy were dispossessed of their lands and expelled from their parishes. However among many of the congregations the biblical teachings of Iona continued, howbeit underground, nurtured by Waldensian and Wycliffian missionaries. Thankfully, the faith of Iona flowered once more during the Scottish Reformation of the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

## Europe

After the settlement of the Gothic tribes and the destructive influence of Clovis of the Franks, the re-establishment of the true Christian faith in Europe commenced with the arrival of Columbanus and thirteen companions. Columbanus (or Columban - 543-615 AD) also came from the Irish church nurtured by St Patrick. He had been educated and trained for his work at the Celtic college at Bangor in Wales. His work too, represented the great missionary movement of this time.

In 573 AD, with his thirteen companions, Columbanus was inspired to commence his missionary work in Gaul. His group set up schools, firstly in Gaul, then in Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Northern Italy. As well as implanting the true faith amongst the population, they brought education to an ignorant and benighted Europe.

While in England and Scotland the Irish missionaries were confronted by heathenism, in Europe they were opposed by a corrupt and debased aberration of the Christian faith. At a time when Pope Gregory I was the champion of ignorance and the opponent of enlightenment, the Celtic schools became centers of the gospel, of learning and of civilization.<sup>12</sup> Their efforts were crowned with remarkable success and the Celtic faith began to spread throughout Northern Europe.

*There was a continual stream of missionaries from the churches of Ireland and Scotland flowing toward the continental church.<sup>13</sup>*

*The Irish and Scottish Churches covered the British Isles and the continent of Europe with their thousands of missionary centers in a short period.<sup>14</sup>*

*Columban introduced into Gaul such a durable monument of the religious spirit of Ireland, that during his life no less than one thousand abbots recognized the laws of a single superior.<sup>15</sup> (Pictures of Irish centres in Europe & Bobbio, Italy.)*

The mission continued unabated for almost two hundred years until persecution beginning in 733 AD caused the Celtic church in Europe to split into separate units. However these small, threatened communities retained their faith and their witness.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 115 -116.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 184 -190.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>15</sup> Clarence Wyatt Bispham, *Columban, Saint, Monk and Missionary* (New York: E.S. Gorham, 1903), in B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 198.

## England

As has already been noted, the heathen Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded Britain in 449 AD and drove the Britons and the Celtic church into the Western regions.

Aiden, a Celtic missionary also educated at Iona's university, pioneered the gospel work among the English. He established a center of learning on the isle of Lindisfarne on the eastern coast of North England and modeled it on the Iona plan. The truth of the matter is that it was Aiden, not Augustine, who was the true Apostle to England. He commenced his ministry in about 634 AD and labored for 17 years. He was succeeded by Finan who, after labouring for ten years was succeeded in turn by Coleman, who labored for three years. Monasteries or colleges were established at Melrose, Whitby and Tillbery. It was Celtic missionaries who won two-thirds of the English population to the Christian faith.

*It is no exaggeration to say that, with the exception of Kent and Sussex, the whole English race received the foundation of their faith from Celtic missionaries, and even in Sussex it is known that Irish missionaries were at work before the arrival of Wilfrid (the Roman Catholic priest).<sup>16</sup>*

*Northumbrian Christianity spread over the southern kingdoms.<sup>17</sup>*

In 664 AD, through the Roman Catholic Queen of Northumbria, the Papacy produced a crisis in the Celtic church. In the Council of Whitby in which the Celtic and Roman churches debated over the question of the true Easter, the king of Northumbria sided with the Catholics, an action which had a deleterious effect on the Celtic church.

The later invasion of the Danes in 820 AD checked the spread of Catholicism; however it also devastated the English Celtic churches right to the Welsh and Scottish borders. Finally, in 1066 AD through William the Conqueror, a Roman Catholic instrument, the Papacy gained the ascendancy in England.

However the work of Aiden, Finan, Coleman and others had not been in vain.

*The faith represented by the Celtic leaders remained powerful in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and in the southwestern part of England. Followers of the truth persisted down through the centuries, so that when Wycliffe began his marvelous revival centuries later, his followers are thought by some to have been those who had maintained from generation to generation the doctrines of Aiden.<sup>18</sup>*

## The Church of the East (538-1500)

Just as the Christian faith had been proclaimed to the west of Palestine, in harmony with Jesus' command, the apostles engaged in evangelical outreach to the north, the south and the east of territory where Jesus had walked. Toward the close of the second century, however, because of the growing strength of the Roman Church in the West, and because the churches of the East refused to accept the Papal pagan Easter, the

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<sup>16</sup> John L. Meisner, *The Celtic Church in England* (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1929), 178.

<sup>17</sup> C.F. Montalembert, *The Monks of the West from St. Benedict to St. Bernard* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1867), 1:88.

<sup>18</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 303-308.



Pope, Victor I, was able to excommunicate the Eastern Church. The Eastern faith became independent of Rome and established its own organization, proclaiming its gospel in the vast lands of the east. It has been given various titles over the years, often called the Nestorian church, however this term is incorrect.

The Eastern Church had four main groupings:

1. The Jacobites or Monophysites
2. The Ethiopian Church
3. The Coptic or Egyptian Church
4. The Armenian Church

These groups were all in agreement on the main points of the faith even if they disagreed on some secondary or minor points.

The Church of the East has been called The Waldenses of the East. Generally they were called Messiahans or Messiah People. They carried the Gospel to India, Central Asia and China. By 200 AD they had planted churches among the Parthians, Persians, Medes, Bactrians, Scythians, Turks and Huns.<sup>19</sup> Their first leader, or catholicos, was Papas (285 AD). At first its converts suffered great persecution, especially from pagan Persian rulers. It resulted in horrendous martyrdoms.

The Church of the East was also called the Assyrian church. They had a distinguished church college at Edessa which included a celebrated school of medicine. It was, however, shut down by the Roman emperor Zeno because they refused to accept the apostate positions of the Catholic Church. The Assyrian church consequently moved the college to Nisibis, beyond the reach of the Roman Empire.

The reputation of Nisibis as one of the great intellectual centers of the world reached even Oxford, Cambridge and Paris. The Christians of Nisibis taught the Arab tribes. They used a Bible, unlike the Roman version, called the Peshita, which came from the famous Syrian scholar and martyr, Lucian, from which came the Textus Receptus. (Our Authorized - or King James - version is based on this manuscript).

The Eastern Church headquarters were located first at Seleucia in Iraq and Christian Jews were predominant within the fellowship. In early Christian times the vast population of central Asia had many of its cities connected by a sophisticated system of roads providing ease of travel for Christian missionaries. In 498 AD the Persian king, Kaved, took refuge with the Turks and Huns in central Asia where he found Christians who helped him regain his throne.

The Assyrian Christians taught the Turks and the Arabs the skill of writing. There is also evidence that the Assyrian Christians developed the alphabets of Central Asia and the Far East: these include the Mongolian, Manchu and the Soghdian languages. In Chinese Turkestan thousands of manuscripts have been unearthed revealing that the Christian faith was once established in those areas.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 276.

*In the sixth century, according to the report of a Nestorian traveler, Christianity was successfully preached to the Bactrians, the Huns, the Persians, the Indians, the Persarmenians, the Medes and the Elamites: the barbaric churches, from the Gulf of Persia to the Caspian Sea, were almost infinite. . . .*

*The pepper coast of Malabar and the isles of the ocean, Socotora and Ceylon, were peopled with an increasing multitude of Christians; and the bishops... derived their ordination from the Catholicos (or leader) of Babylon.<sup>21</sup>*

In the period of 500-575 AD, Aba was the leader of the Church of the East. The church fared reasonably well under Arab rule after the Arab conquests of the mid-seventh century. When the Arabs set up their new capital at Baghdad, the Assyrian Church followed, transferring its headquarters from Seleucia to Baghdad in 762 AD.<sup>22</sup>

The Arabs were favourable towards the Assyrian Christians because of both their advanced educational system and of their outstanding medical expertise. Many Christians were consequently employed within the Arabian government administration.<sup>23</sup>

By 800 AD numerous missionaries had spread the faith through India and China. One Jacobite writer stated that the Turks of farther Asia, the Tartars who lived a nomadic existence, possessed the Old and New Testaments in their own tongue. The Tartars had four kings who ruled over four hundred thousand families, a total of eight million people, all of whom were obedient to the gospel. Also in the year of 800 AD there was a line of Christian kings in the depths of Scythia by the name of Prester John. Mingana declares that

*The Church of the East was the greatest missionary church ever produced.<sup>24</sup>*

Its territory included Turkestan, Siberia, Mongolia, Manchuria and Tibet. At the close of the twelfth century AD all Asia was affected by the rise of Ghengis Khan. He conquered vast regions of Asia even to Europe. He died in 1226 AD but Ghengis Khan was not a persecutor of the Christians. His wife was an Assyrian Christian. Why did the fearful invasions of the Mongols suddenly cease? The reason is that a relative of Ghengis Khan who was a true Christian came to the Mongolian throne.

By 1000 AD the bulk of the population of Syria, Iraq and Khurasan (NE Persia) were Christian. They had also made great progress in Central Asia.<sup>25</sup>

*In 1009 AD Abdisho from Khurasan reported to his leader that two hundred thousand Turks and Mongolians had accepted the gospel.<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1789), 7:Ch. XL, Par. 28.

<sup>22</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 282-283.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>24</sup> Alphonse Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East* (Manchester: The University Press, 1925), in B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 291.

<sup>25</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 286-290.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 290-292.

In India also, many Christian communities existed by 500 AD, mainly because India had become a safe haven for persecuted Christians. Numerous Christians had fled from persecution within the Roman Empire eastwards to Persia and had subsequently fled to India when persecution followed them into the Persian lands.<sup>27</sup>

As Mingana states

*The fifth century opens with an Indian Christianity which was in such a state of development that she is able to send her priests to be educated in the best schools of the East Syrian Church and to assist the doctors of that Church in their revision of the ancient Syriac translations of the Pauline Epistles.*<sup>28</sup>

So powerful was the witness of the Assyrian church in India that the Brahmans (Hindu leaders) were compelled to modify their beliefs and inculcate Christian concepts into Hinduism, resulting in the invention of Krishna as a counterfeit Christ. This strategy brought a revival to Hinduism, which had been in serious decline.<sup>29</sup>

*At the very date, AD 535...churches with a complete liturgy were then to be found in Ceylon, Malabar, Socotra, and NW India (apparently identical with the St. Thomas Christians) ministered to by bishops and priests sent from the Patriarch of Seleucia; also in Bactria and amongst the Huns; in Mesopotamia, Scythia etc.*<sup>30</sup>

Records reveal the increasing development of the Church of the East, especially in the south and east of India, and its extension to Sumatra, Java, Borneo and the Spice Islands.<sup>31</sup>

In 1500 AD, when the Catholic Portuguese arrived in India, the Jesuits soon followed and there began a diabolical Inquisition. The persecution was appallingly effective: the true church in India was soon crushed.<sup>32</sup>

## China

Around the time of the seventh century China ruled most of Asia and this remarkable civilization was significantly influenced by the Church in the East.<sup>33</sup> In 781 AD a marble memorial was erected in Changan (Sian or Sianfu) capital of the Tang dynasty - the highest civilization known in China (618-907 AD). The memorial commemorated the advent of Christianity into China. This so-called Nestorian monument, inscribed in both Chinese and Syriac languages, testified to the success of Christianity (the Assyrian church) in the early centuries in China. This was a fulfillment of the prediction of Isaiah, who foresaw how the Christian faith would find a response in China.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 303-308.

<sup>28</sup> Alphonse Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East* in B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 308.

<sup>29</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 136.

<sup>30</sup> E. A. Gordon, *World Healers* (London: Eugene L. Morice, 1912), 77.

<sup>31</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 305-311.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 314-330.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 331-335.

*I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth... Surely these shall come from afar; look those from the north and the west; and these from the land of Sinim (China). Isaiah 49:6,12*

The evidence reveals that the Gospel penetrated everywhere throughout central Asia and churches multiplied throughout China. The Syrian language of the Christian missionaries extended far and wide.<sup>34</sup>

*It is astonishing to see how the Assyrian Church preserved the unity of its faith throughout its far-flung spiritual domain whether it was in India, Tibet, Turkestan, Persia or China.<sup>35</sup>*

*The clergy who led the Church of the East to victory were men of consecration and scholarship.<sup>36</sup>*

At times they were beset by furious persecution, but the faith continued to expand. As Gibbon declared

*The Christianity of China between the seventh and the thirteenth century is invincibly proved by the consent of Chinese, Arabian, Syriac and Latin evidence.<sup>37</sup>*

As mentioned previously, in 1204 AD the Mongols began their remarkable conquest of Asia and Eastern Europe. Ghengis Khan and his son Ogatai had unified the Oriental nations and opened the way for their subjugation of these established civilizations. The three nephews of Ogatai succeeded them and their triumph over all the Oriental world coincided with the remarkable success of the gospel via the Assyrian church.

These rulers were favourably disposed toward the Assyrian church because they saw the benefit to their peoples of both the medical learning and the business skills of the Christians. Under these conditions it is understandable how Christianity spread throughout Asia and the faith's followers were numbered in the millions.

## **Demise of the Church of the East**

What became of the church of the East? Unfortunately four events brought it to ruin.

1. **Prosperity.** The growth in material wealth led to the undermining of the church. The early spirit of devotion and enthusiasm declined and pageantry and formal ceremonies replaced spiritual power.
2. **Tamerlane.** This fierce and fanatical Moslem led the Turks in their awesome conquest of all Asia: from Russia to China. His campaigns alone were responsible for the destruction of much of the Church of the East.
3. **Topographical changes.** Vast populated areas were engulfed by desert sands and destroyed. The area affected embraced Siberia, Turkestan and northern China.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.344

<sup>37</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 8: Note 118.

*Between Khotan and China the moving sands of the desert have covered uncounted cities in eastern Turkestan which anciently were the seats of flourishing commerce and prosperous communities.*<sup>38</sup>

*On one occasion three hundred and sixty six cities were buried in twenty-four hours.*<sup>39</sup>

4. **The Jesuits.** The arrival of the Jesuits in China and India with their notorious Portuguese Inquisition decimated the true faith.<sup>40</sup>

## True faith in Europe (from 700AD)

In 723 AD the Englishman Boniface was sent to Europe by Pope Gregory III to subvert the Celtic church and win the Celtic Christians to Romanism.<sup>41</sup> The ascendancy of the Catholic Charles Martel led to the commencement of persecution against the Celtic church in 733 after his defeat of the Moslems at Tours the year previous. The ultimate subjugation of the Celtic church in Europe was completed by Charlemagne (800 AD).<sup>42</sup> Thankfully, however, remnant groups of true believers survived in remote areas of the continent.

Further east, the Bulgarians were won to Christ by Greek and Paulician believers who were opposed to Rome and recognized as true Christians who withstood the apostasy of the day.<sup>43</sup> The Paulicians were a large group of believers who began migrating from Armenia and Asia Minor into various areas in Europe during this period. This outreach commenced in 864 AD bringing revival to the scattered faithful remnants throughout Europe.<sup>44</sup>

Various incidents in Europe reveal the existence and witness of true believers.

1017 AD the martyrdom of thirteen believers at Orleans, France, including the former chaplain to the queen and others noted for both their learning and holiness.

1025 AD the trial of a group at Arras, France, who were subsequently martyred. Their trial revealed that there were many churches of these believers whose doctrines emanated from Northern Italy (Waldenses).

1050 AD Berengarius of Tours, an ex-Roman Catholic prelate who united with the Waldenses, had a powerful impact upon France, England and Italy. He had thousands of followers. He called the Church of Rome *The Congregation of the Wicked* and *The Seat of Satan* as did the Waldenses also. He publicly opposed the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, ie that the priest turns the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> H. Yule and H. Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (London: Thomas R. Murray, 1921), 1:191-192.

<sup>39</sup> W. F. Johnson, "unknown", *The Royal Geographical Society* 37, 1867):

<sup>40</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 359-364.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-202.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-207.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>44</sup> J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1878), 1:131.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-231.

- 1079 AD Pope Gregory VII decreed that the Latin language was to be used exclusively in all churches of Moravia and Bohemia. This shut the door of truth to the general populace.<sup>46</sup>
- 1100 AD the famous Waldensian Nobla Lecon (Noble Lesson) was written. It is a sublime presentation of the origin and unfolding of the plan of redemption. This contribution to world literature in the Romaunt language came from a persecuted and martyred people.<sup>47</sup>
- 1104 AD Peter de Bruys, from the French Waldensian Valleys, stirred Southern France by his biblical, apostolic preaching. Misrepresented by Rome, he was finally martyred at the stake in 1124 AD.
- 1128 AD Henry of Lausanne, a gifted disciple of Peter de Bruys, powerfully proclaimed the gospel to the masses, especially in Southern France. His influence was so great that he was assailed by the leading Roman figure, Bernard of Clairvaux, who relentlessly attacked him. Peter was finally imprisoned and disappeared without a trace.
- 1150 AD Arnold of Brescia, a powerful and eloquent preacher, exposed the errors of the Papacy. He was far ahead of his age, denouncing the union of church and state. He preached in Switzerland, France, Germany and Italy. Even a church synod met to counter Arnold's work. He was finally burned to death; however he left behind numerous loyal followers.
- 1175 AD Peter Waldo of Lyons, France, was a wealthy merchant who forsook his riches and proclaimed the gospel and the doctrines drawn from the New Testament. He exposed the Church of Rome as the 'man of sin' in 2 Thessalonians 2, and the beast of Revelation. What is of interest is that Rome has continued to fraudulently brand Waldo the founder of the Waldenses, in order to hide the truth that there were numerous Christian dissenters against Rome centuries before Waldo's time.<sup>48</sup> However he revived the Waldensians throughout Europe, increasing their numbers significantly and stimulated the widespread circulation of the Scriptures. As the result of persecution he withdrew to Bohemia while his followers retired to the Waldensian Valleys.

## The Albigenses

The Albigenses were a large group of Christian dissenters who resided in the four provinces of Dauphine, Provence, Languedoc and Gascogne. These provinces are in the South of France between the Cottian Alps in the east and the Pyrenees in the south-west. Although of Gaulish or Cis-Alpine nationality, they were identical in faith and doctrine to the Waldenses.<sup>49</sup>

The Waldenses had separated from the established church in the time of Sylvester, Bishop of Rome, and Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicaea 314-337 AD. They rapidly spread their faith throughout Europe, however they settled primarily in the provinces of South France. They influenced the population there to such an extent that

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>47</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 244-245.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 245-246

<sup>49</sup> J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* 1:23-32, 2:430-508.

this region of Narbonne-Gaul became a flourishing, enlightened and independent civilization.

The Albigenses were skilful cultivators of the land but also excelled in commerce, art, poetry and music. Their troubadours or minstrels were particularly effective as colporteurs and missionaries. They possessed the New Testament in their own Provençal languages, taken from the Latin Itala Bible which had been translated from the uncorrupted Greek manuscripts of Lucian. This led to the development of a pure form of Christianity.

The Albigensian civilization was a striking contrast to that of the benighted peoples in the rest of Europe. However, as always, Rome was not prepared to tolerate a faith that would not submit to its authority. Between 1119 and 1229 AD six Roman Catholic councils were conducted to counter the work of the Albigenses.<sup>50</sup> The end was as predictable as it was horrific with an appalling crusade of extermination instigated under Pope Innocent III. Over one million of the Albigensian faithful were slaughtered by the forces of Rome.

*In the exposition made by the (Roman Catholic) Bishop of Tournay, of the errors of the Albigenses, says Sismondi, we find nearly all the principles upon which Luther and Calvin founded the Reformation of the sixteenth century*<sup>51</sup>

## Revival in England

At the very time Innocent III was instigating the massacre of the Albigenses of Southern France, England was beginning to revolt against the Papal yoke. In 1215 the Magna Carta was signed by an array of English nobility, a direct reaction to the Papal dominance of England through the monarchy. The Pope annulled and declared void the Magna Carta, but the spark of opposition had ignited, it was the beginning of England's emancipation. As she cast off the Papal shackles England began to grow in power and wealth.<sup>52</sup>

It was timely, therefore, that against this background wherein the English barons began to free England from the political power of the Papacy, God raised up John Wycliffe (1324-1384). Soon Wycliffe commenced to free England from the Papacy's darkening spiritual influence. This outstanding Englishman rose like a brilliant star amid the darkness of the Papal night. A scholar of Oxford University, he began giving lectures on Bible truths in 1360. It was only a matter of time before Wycliffe clashed with the friars, the ignorant and corrupt Franciscan and Dominican monks, who did for the Papacy in the years that preceded the Reformation what the Jesuits have done for it in the centuries that have followed. The Franciscans and Dominicans spiritually ravished the realm and Wycliffe lifted his voice against them. He exploded with scripture the corrupt practice of indulgences and concluded that the Popes were the Antichrist of prophecy. He exposed many of the errors of Rome. He strongly attacked the Catholic Eucharist with its erroneous theory of transubstantiation. At the same time he brought to light many

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 1:38-46.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 1:45.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1:64-71.

fundamentals of the gospel which brought faith and hope to a people in dire need of the 'good news'.<sup>53</sup>

Wycliffe's influence spread throughout the whole of England. He influenced the thinking of scholars at Oxford. He exhorted the laity through his Lutterworth pulpit. He engaged the parliament through debate and Royalty by helping to mould policy. He overthrew the doctrine of the temporal supremacy of the popes and their power to pronounce anathema on any opposition. His greatest feat - an enduring one - was the translation of the Bible into English.

*His doctrine spread, "like suckers from the root of a tree", complained Knighton, his bitter enemy. Among the common people his disciples were innumerable.*

*You could not meet two men on the highway, said his enemies, but one of them is a Wycliffite.<sup>54</sup>*

Wycliffe's disciples were called Lollards, after Peter Lollard, the Waldensian missionary, who, McCabe declared, had paved the way for Wycliffe in England.

Wycliffe ...organized a band of preachers - simple, pious, earnest men - who knew the Gospel, and were willing to preach it at crossroads and in market-places, in city and village and rural lane - everywhere, in short.<sup>55</sup> They ...*traversed the kingdom, preaching the gospel.*

*Their countrymen flocked to their sermons. The soldiers mingled with the civilians, sword in hand, ready to defend the preacher... Several of the nobility joined their party.... There followed, wherever their doctrine was received, a reformation of manners, and in some places a purging of the public worship by the removal of idolatrous symbols.*

*Within ten years of the death of Wycliffe in 1395 they petitioned Parliament for a reformation in religion.<sup>56</sup>*

But England was not yet ready for reformation. The authorities turned upon the Lollards and enacted the first law in England which consigned heretics against the Roman faith to the flames. The first martyr was William Sawtre, the rector of St Orsyth, London. Soon others followed in his fiery steps.

Famous among them was the godly Lord Cobham who was burned to death in 1417.

*These simple men, who read the Scriptures, believed what they taught, and assembled in secret places to worship God, are painted... as the most dangerous of conspirators - as men aiming at the destruction of society itself, and so are to be hunted out and exterminated.<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1:82, 127-129.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1:125.

<sup>55</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 249.

<sup>56</sup> J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* 1:367.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 1:407.



In spite of their treatment the Lollards kept preaching their enlightened gospel and their growth was a torment to the Catholic clergy of England. Their martyrdoms and numerous edicts issued against them testify to their numbers and influence. Wycliffe's followers sowed the seed which finally bore fruit in the Protestant Reformation of England.

## Bohemia

The teachings of Wycliffe developed into two streams: the Lollards and the Hussites.

**Lollardism** in Britain experienced imprisonment and martyrdom, yet it led to them ultimately overcoming.

**Hussitism** in Bohemia succumbed to wars, engaged in compromise with Rome and experienced subsequent defeat, leaving only a persecuted and scattered remnant.

Bohemia proved a fertile field for belief in Christ. In the early decades of the faith many persecuted Waldensians found refuge in this land, where they sowed and watered the seeds of truth.

In the 14th century three Catholic priests were raised up to prepare the way for Bohemia's part in the battle for the true faith. They were John Militz, Conrad Stickna and Mathew Janovius. All three men were learned, eloquent and godly. They publicly exposed the abuses of the clergy at large. Militz, after visiting Rome, wrote over a cardinal's door *Antichrist is now come and sitteth in the church*. Once persecution commenced it compelled faithful believers to abandon their churches and meeting halls and worship in forests and caves. On his deathbed Janovius prophesied

*"The rage of the enemies of the truth," he said, "now prevails against us, but it will not be for ever; there shall arise one from among the common people, without sword or authority, and against him they shall not be able to prevail."*<sup>58</sup>

During this same period Bohemia was being politically prepared for her chosen role. Charles IV, Emperor of Germany, who was also Charles I of Bohemia, supported Janovius, desiring reform. He established peace, prosperity and liberty as well as education in the national tongue. Into this atmosphere was born the celebrated reformer John Huss (1373-1415).

Of humble origin but brilliant mind, Huss completed his education at the University of Prague. After his graduation he continued there as a lecturer, as well as joining the Catholic priesthood and becoming an eminent preacher. Around 1402 he was appointed the preacher of the Chapel of Bethlehem, Prague. Because of the deplorable lack of morality among the populace, Huss was led to become the conscience of Prague as he proclaimed against the abuses within society, regardless of the social standing of the offenders. Turning to Scripture for authority he became absorbed by its truth and its spirit. Thus was laid the foundation for the Protestant faith.

In addition there was the influence of the writings of Wycliffe which had been introduced into the university and the Court. These writings were also being publicized by the powerful preaching of Jerome, an Oxford graduate and a Bohemian knight. When the reaction came, Huss temporarily departed from Prague, returning later to thunder more

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1:139.

intensely against the tyrannical priesthood and the corrupt practices of three men, each of whom was posing as a pope.

As Huss's biblical understanding increased, he learned of further falsehoods of Rome and finally concluded that the Pope and his court were members of Antichrist. He climaxed his attack by nailing *Six Errors* of Rome on the door of Bethlehem chapel. Bohemia was stirred: the country divided. Huss again voluntarily forsook Prague to live and preach among his own people.

At the Council of Constance in 1414, under despicable circumstances, Huss and Jerome were tried and condemned to the stake. Before Huss died he repeated his previous prediction

*It is thus that you silence the goose (the name Huss means goose) but a hundred years hence there will arise a swan whose singing you shall not be able to silence.*<sup>59</sup>

The swan was an allusion to Luther. Likewise with Jerome, in his final address he declared,

*"In dying," he said, "I shall leave a sting in your hearts and a gnawing worm in your consciences. And I cite you all to answer to me before the most high and just Judge within a hundred years."*<sup>60</sup>

The criminal action against these two men united all Bohemia – both Catholic and non-Catholic – against the Papacy and its political minions. The influence of Huss and Jerome became greater now than when they had lived: Their writings were studied as never before.

*Within four years from the death of Huss the bulk of the nation had embraced the faith for which he died.*<sup>61</sup>

The Bohemian Church resumed the use of the cup in Communion and conducted their services in the national language instead of in Latin. As a consequence they rejected the hallmarks of papal submission. However, they were divided into two groups: the Taborites, who completely rejected papal authority, making the Scriptures their sole standard; and the Calixtines, who remained nominal Catholics while in their hearts they were opposed to Rome.

*The cup became the national Protestant symbol. It was blazoned on their standards and carried in the van of their armies; it was sculptured on the portals of their churches...It was ever placed in studied contrast to the Roman symbol, which was the cross.*<sup>62</sup>

The response was severe: the Papacy called for the extermination of the Bohemian nation. Emperor Sigismund, with several German states, prepared to perpetrate the outrage. However, at just the right time, God had the man to organize and lead the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 1:159.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 1:180.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.; 1:185.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 1:185.

Bohemians, or Hussites as they were now called. This man was John Troszowski, also known as Ziska, considered by many to be the greatest military general of all time.

After putting down the Catholic resistance in Bohemia, the numerous, magnificent churches and monasteries were wrecked, and their immense wealth confiscated. These spoils were then used for the defense of the realm. For eighteen years Ziska led the Hussite military campaigns to ensure their self-preservation. He was succeeded in this task, in time, by Procopius.

Despite fighting against overwhelming odds, the Hussites were never defeated in the field of battle. Indisputably angelic agencies combined with them to put the Catholic armies to flight. It was a repetition of Old Testament battles when invisible forces came to Israel's aid.

Once again Rome had to change her tactics. Now, instead of military confrontation, she resorted to the subterfuge of establishing councils to sway the balance of people in her favour. Unfortunately the Hussites, anxious for peace, compromised their principles and signed *The Compactata*. In the end this document only gave a feeble guarantee of protection to Bohemian faith and of religious liberty. Not unexpectedly, from the time of this compromise with Rome, the strength and prestige of Bohemia waned. There were no more victories to be gained and the tide of national prosperity that had typified their recent history began to recede. Soon they began to fight among themselves. Then, when Sigismund the Catholic Emperor took the throne, to Bohemia's detriment he broke the agreement that had been arrived at and began to restore the Papacy. The compromise had gained the Hussites nothing.

The Taborites resorted to their own city and the territory of Tabor. Here they flourished. Forty years after the martyrdom of Huss and Jerome, because of the error that surrounded their island of true faith, they formed themselves into a separate church called United Brethren. This initiative aroused bitter enmity and opposition from the general population. As a result they (the Taborites)

*were dispersed in forests and mountains; they inhabited dens and caves; and in these abodes they were ever careful to prepare their meals by night, lest the ascending smoke should betray their lurking-places. Gathering round the fires which they kindled in these subterranean retreats in the cold of winter, they read the Word of God and united in social worship.*<sup>63</sup>

This faithful, isolated remnant wondered if they were the only witnesses to true faith remaining in the earth. Secretly they sent messengers to countries throughout Europe in search of a reassuring answer to that vexing question. However in the darkness that seemed to cover the earth as a blanket of fear and superstition they found groups of isolated believers such as themselves, who were faithful to Scriptural teachings and were also the objects of persecution because of their stance. In the Cottian Alps of North Italy, for instance, they found an ancient church based upon the Word of God which also protested against the corruptions of Rome.

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<sup>63</sup> Merle d'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1863-1878), 31.

The Taborites opened communications with the Waldenses and found that in belief, the practice of ordination and in ceremonies and religious festivals they were in agreement. This discovery understandably brought a great deal of joy to the Taborites and inspired them to engage in missionary outreach. As a consequence their congregations increased in both number and size. However they were always mindful of the predictions of Huss which were also repeated by Jerome, that a hundred years would pass before *the day would break*. Mindfulness of this prophecy kept their hopes alive during the dark night of persecution.

By the end of the century there existed 200 churches of the United Brethren in Bohemia and Moravia. From these fellowships later came the Moravians – those most intrepid missionaries of the eighteenth century.

## Dissent within the Church of Rome

Within the Church of Rome itself noble men also rose up to witness against the sins of their mother church: but their blood stained the scaffolds and their ashes so often were scattered to the winds.

**Thomas Conecte**, a Carmelite friar, appeared in Flanders, publicly denounced the abominations practiced in Rome and called for reform.

*All the country listened with enthusiasm, Rome condemned him to the stake in 1432 and his contemporaries declared that he had been translated to heaven.*<sup>64</sup>

**Cardinal Andrew** (Archbishop of Crayn), the Emperor's ambassador to Rome, was struck with dismay when he discovered that the notion of papal sanctity was a laughable fiction. He called for a new council to deal with

*the sins, vices, unrighteousness, errors and countless evils... the reformation of the Catholic faith and the purification of morals.*<sup>64</sup>

He was mocked when he addressed Pope Sixtus IV and called for reform. Finally he was imprisoned at Basle where he perished in 1484. His prosecutor, the inquisitor Henry Institoris declared

*All the world cries out and demands a council, but there is no human power that can reform the church by a council. The Most High will find other means, which are at present unknown to us, although they may be at our very doors, to bring back the church to its pristine condition.*<sup>65</sup>

This was an astounding, if unwitting prediction, given around the very time of Luther's birth.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>65</sup> Le Roy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 2:142-153.

**Jerome Savanorola of Florence** - aroused by the corruptions within the church this Dominican monk (1452-1498) preached with great power and conviction. He concluded that the Papacy was Babylon and urged the people to flee from its influence. He was a brilliant light in a dark place: his words were like flashes of lightning and reverberations of thunder. He taught justification by faith and his preaching passionately uplifted the crucified Christ.

Rome, following her normal *modus operandi*, seized this saintly scholar and after they had him tortured he was publicly burnt at the stake. To add insult to injury his ashes were consigned to the river Arno. A bronze plaque in the square where he was burned reads, *By Unrighteous Sentence*. His death was not in vain. The experience of Savanorola later convinced Luther that reform of the Church of Rome was hopeless.<sup>66</sup>

**John Lallier** - In 1484 this doctor of the Sorbonne stood up against the corrupt and erroneous teachings of Rome. He urged the keeping of the commandments of God rather than the whims of a pope. He said

*They have ruined the church by their crafty devices...since the time of Sylvester (320 AD) the Romish church is no longer the church of Christ.*<sup>67</sup>

**John of Wesalia** - A Doctor of Divinity of Erfurt - attacked Rome's errors and proclaimed the Bible as the sole source of faith. He boldly preached that it is by the grace of God alone that the elect are saved. *I despise the Pope, the church and the councils and I give Christ the glory*. He communicated with the Hussites with whom he found himself in agreement. Finally he was condemned by the Inquisition and perished in their dungeons in 1482.

**John Wessel** - another scholar considered by some to be the most remarkable forerunner of the Reformation, he was a Doctor of Divinity successively at Cologne, Louvain, Paris and Heidelberg. He was surnamed *The light of the world*. Luther later declared of him.

*Had I read his work sooner, my enemies might have thought that I had derived everything from Wessel, so much are we of one mind.*<sup>68</sup>

Voices continued to multiply indicating that soon the sun was to rise, bringing light to the world.

*The teachings of John Wycliffe of Oxford had spread over all Christendom and had found adherents in Bavaria, Swabia, Franconia and Prussia.*<sup>69</sup>

**John Hilten** was Franciscan monk in Eisenach. He was led to study the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and wrote a commentary on these books. He also censured the flagrant abuses of his fellow monks, who subsequently imprisoned him in the filthy dungeon below the monastery. From the year 1477 he was imprisoned for more than

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<sup>66</sup> Merle d'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

twenty years. When about to die he called the head of the monastery, who abused him because of his beliefs. Hilten said in reply:

*I bear your insults calmly for the love of Christ...but another shall arise in the year 1516. He will destroy you and you shall not be able to resist him.*<sup>70</sup>

A few years earlier and not many kilometers away Martin Luther was born. In 1517 Luther also took his stand for Christ and defied the Pope and all the papacy stood for.

Thus ended the period of the Church of Thyatira. This period - the longest of all the seven churches - lasted for almost one thousand years from 538 to 1517 AD.

## Christ's commendation

In the light of the history of this period of the church, it is important to notice the message of Christ to His people who lived through this dark era.

***I know your works, love, service, faith and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. v19***

Considering the circumstances of the Thyatiran period, such a list of commendations is remarkable. Of all the seven churches, Thyatira stands second in the wealth of its witness for Christ. The only church period to excel Thyatira's performance is the Ephesian era covering the apostolic church, which witnessed by virtue of the power of Pentecost.

Christ highlights the fact that the labours of believers in the latter part of the Thyatiran period were of greater magnitude than those of the earlier part. Toward the end of this period the Papacy was more dominant, more autocratic and more relentless in her opposition to truth. As a response to Rome's activity the saints were inspired to greater efforts for Christ.

## Christ's complaint

In spite of their wonderful works, Christ reminded his Thyatiran church that they still had a few failings. These shortcomings were recorded for the encouragement of future believers.

***Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things offered to idols. v20***

The question remains as to the identity of Jezebel. Because Revelation is based on the Old Testament, the key to understanding this book is ascertaining the Old Testament source from which the imagery is drawn. The name of the woman Jezebel is associated with King Ahab and the prophet Elijah<sup>71</sup> at what proved a critical period in the history of Israel, around the year 900 BC. Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Sidon, a priest of the pagan sun god Baal. She, a pagan princess, married King Ahab of Israel. Her

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>71</sup> 1 Kings 17:29-34; 18:19;21,22; 2 Kings 1&2; 9:1-37; 10:1-28.

dominating influence over Ahab led him to establish the apostate worship of Baal. As a consequence the majority of Israel was led into apostasy.

The prophet Elijah was raised up by God to warn His people of their danger and to expose Baal worship for the corrupt practice it was. It was therefore his role to call Israel to repentance and reform. As a result of a devastating 3½ year drought that was visited upon Israel, Jezebel turned on those Israelites still faithful to the true God. During this period of persecution and slaughter, the grip of Baal strengthened upon the populace.

Eventually, on Mount Carmel Elijah publicly exposed the errors of Baal worship and Israel began to turn back to the true God. Ahab and Jezebel, however, continued to reject the prophet's call. Elijah then predicted the dire results that would come to this couple because of their obstinacy. Eventually Ahab, Jezebel and their whole family were destroyed in the manner that had been predicted.

This dramatic episode in Israel's history was a picture of the experience to befall spiritual Israel in the Christian era. In prophecy the figure of a woman is used to symbolize a religious body or church.<sup>72</sup> A corrupt woman, consequently, represents the church or religious organization of Satan. Jezebel was a pagan sun worshipper, a prophetess who facilitated paganism's evil spread; and thus she represents a religious organization of Satan which at heart finds fulfillment in pagan worship. This means that it would be of Babylonian origin.

Jezebel represents the harlot church of Revelation 17, the one who is attired in purple and scarlet, those same colours Thyatira produced and for which it was famous.

The table in Appendix A outlines how the experience of ancient Israel, in its interaction with Jezebel is typical of what has befallen the church within this Christian era.

***...you allow... Jezebel to teach and seduce my servants...***

At times Catholic teachers were permitted to promulgate Rome's errors among believers and thereby spiritually seduced them into compromise. With the passing of time resistance to error and popular beliefs lessened and the errors of Rome infiltrated some groups of the faithful.

## **Decline of the Celtic Church**

Dr B.D. Wilkinson, writing from the authority of J.A. Wylie, summarizes the declining circumstances of the Celtic Church region by region as follows:

### **Ireland**

*So the Celtic Church in Ireland succumbed more or less to papal practices.<sup>73</sup>*

*Finally, a traitor to the Celtic Church was found in Celsus, the Celtic archbishop of Armagh, who contrived to make Malachy, a youth instructed in the continental school of Bernard of Clairvaux and deeply permeated by papal teaching, his*

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<sup>72</sup> A.P. Cooke, *The Woman and the Seven-headed Beast*, (Sydney, Self-published, 1985), 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* 98.

*successor. This Malachy finally reduced Ireland beneath the supremacy of Rome and introduced Roman discipline.*<sup>74</sup>

## Scotland

Within one hundred twenty-five years of the death of Columba, the Picts had been sufficiently swayed by Rome to forsake their former stand and adopt the Roman Easter.<sup>75</sup>

## The Church of the East

*Because of the doctrines passed on by the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), the Ethiopian Church, the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Jacobite Church of Syria, and the Church of Armenia broke off all connection with Rome... It is true that in spite of the comparative purity of the apostolic faith which they maintained during the supremacy of the papacy, they gave way at times to some papal or heathen practice.*<sup>76</sup>

## The Waldensian church

*After early schooling it was not uncommon for the Waldensian youth to proceed to the seminaries in the great cities of Lombardy or to the Sorbonne at Paris.*<sup>77</sup>

These national centers of learning undoubtedly were under the control of Rome.

***And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality; and she did not repent. v21***

In spite of numerous voices raised in protest, even from within the Papacy, the church of Rome refused to repent and reform. The moral corruption and apostasy continued to increase until finally millions of her adherents turned their backs in disgust on Mother Church during the upwelling of the Protestant Reformation.

## Christ's warning

***Indeed I will cast her into a sick bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. v22***

What, we may ask, is the significance of being cast into a bed? This expression appears to denote affliction or tribulation.

*Man also is chastened with pain upon his bed. Job 33:19*

*For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. Isaiah 28:20*

*I will cast her into a bed (of tribulation) and those... into great tribulation.*

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Jamieson et al., *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1871), see Revelation 2:23.



This imagery too is borrowed from the Old Testament account of the experience of Ahab and Jezebel. In response to the message of doom pronounced by Elijah, for a time Ahab displayed a form of repentance and humility, consequently God delayed the visitation of justice.

*I will not bring the calamity in his days. In his son's days will I bring the calamity on his house. 1 Kings 21:27-29*

This fate fell upon Ahaziah the son of Ahab who took the throne upon his father's death. (II Kings 22:51-53). The prediction was fulfilled when Ahaziah was injured by a fall and confined to his bed. As a result of his affliction Ahaziah planned to consult the pagan god Beelzebub but Elijah declared in response.

*You shall not come down from the bed...but you shall surely die.*

This prophecy was repeated three times (2 Kings 1:4, 6, 16) and his sickbed was soon to become his deathbed.

*So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. v17*

Did the apostate church and those united with her suffer affliction, tribulation or death? Perhaps this prediction related to the Papacy once it received the deadly wound in 1798 AD. This affliction resulted in her political power being torn from her when Rome lost all her support from the political kingdoms of the world.

But what of the prediction of *great tribulation* experienced by those in illicit union with Rome? These were the political rulers of Europe, by virtue of the fact that during the early Thyatiran period all the European powers fulsomely supported the Papacy. What did occur shortly, however, was that some of these European kingdoms underwent a form of repentance when they threw off the papal yoke and became Protestant. These countries included England, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark and Scandinavia.

Those European kingdoms who continued their support of the Papacy, on the other hand, finally did suffer affliction or tribulation. These included Spain, Portugal, Italy and France. Because of their support of the Papacy these powers were bled of their wealth and their rulers lost their thrones when their dynasties were overthrown.

***I will kill her children with death...***

In the Old Testament source from which this expression is drawn, the instruction to King Jehu was

*You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish. 2 Kings 9:7-9 (See also v10-37; and 10:1-28)*

The seed, or children, of God's woman of Revelation 12:17 are made up of those who are the faithful followers of the true church of God. Who then are those of the house of Jezebel? The children of Jezebel are necessarily those who are the faithful supporters of

the Church of Rome. So in what way would they be seen to perish - *killed with death*? Translators interpret this expression in different ways

*With pestilence (RSV) her children shall I exterminate. (Moffat)*

*Thoroughly exterminating them (Amplified NT)*

This expression is a Hebraism meaning: *to slay with most sure and awful death*<sup>78</sup>

In the light of the Old Testament type where God decreed the extermination of the family of Ahab, it appears to convey the idea of extermination. If this application is correct, it serves as a stark warning about the care we need to exercise while placing our religious allegiance. The person who clings to a false system of religion is warned in the above Scripture that for them there can be no future. Their destiny is not crowned with eternal life, rather, ultimate extinction.

It is significant that the Thyatiran church period corresponds with the fourth horseman of Revelation 6:8: the pale horse.

*Upon the pale horse death rode and hell (the grave) followed and power was given to kill with sword, hunger, death and beasts.*

There was abundant proof of this during the period of Thyatira – a period when Papal supremacy meant that millions of believers were martyred. It meant literal death for the saints of God: but it meant spiritual death for the followers of the false church.<sup>79</sup>

***...and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. v23***

The thought here is that all the churches have witnessed, or are aware of the visitation of death upon the followers of Jezebel. They also realize that it is an exhibition of God's justice: God reads the motives of humans and metes out justice according to their works. This suggests that an experience has befallen the followers of Jezebel where death in some drastic form had overtaken them. Some believe that this could refer to the terrible visitation of the Black Death during 1348-51.

*Hecker estimates a total of 25 million deaths in Europe and this is considered conservative. These terrible visitations were at the time considered judgments from God because of the corruptions that existed in the church and among the nations.*<sup>80</sup>

***Now to you I say and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say...***

The *doctrine*, or teaching, undoubtedly refers to the teaching of Jezebel in verse 20:

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<sup>78</sup> A.P. Cooke, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, (Sydney, Self-published, 1985).

<sup>79</sup> Taylor G. Bunch, *The Seven Epistles of Christ* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1947), 170.

<sup>80</sup> A. Hislop, *The Two Babylons* (New York: Loiseaux Brothers, 1945), 2,3,5.

*To teach and to seduce my servants to commit (spiritual) fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols (that is, to absorb pagan idolatrous beliefs).*

No doubt this instruction applies to those who had not come under the influence of Jezebel in this period. Elements of the true church continued to exist in areas not controlled by Rome. These included branches of the Church of the East, notably the Assyrian Church. These worshippers would not have known the depths the rule of Satan could bring.

What are *the depths of Satan* if they are associated with the doctrine of Jezebel? Where did the doctrine of Jezebel originate from? It was a religion invented by Babylon's invisible king, Lucifer (Isaiah 14:4, 12-14) and encompassed the philosophy, teachings and practices of sun worship. It involved the occult and was the source of all idolatry, astrology and witchcraft.<sup>81</sup> It has always been Babylon's purpose to counterfeit the true faith and to delude mankind.

One aspect of Babylonian sun worship developed into Gnosticism. Gnostic belief subscribed to an inner or hidden meaning that only their religion could disclose. They saw this hidden meaning as *the depth* or *the deep things of God*.<sup>82</sup> Christ, however, declares their doctrine rather to be the depths of Satan.

***I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. v24-25***

All heaven requires is that true believers be faithful to the light of truth that they possess. We are judged by how we react to what we know to be true and righteous.

*To him who knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin. James 4:17*

*That servant who knew his master's will...and didn't do it...will be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know ... will be beaten with few stripes. Luke 12:47-48*

*Hold fast till I come!* This expression relative to Christ's coming is repeated six times with reference to the seven churches. It appears that the expression refers to Christ coming to each particular church in judgment, however not necessarily at the Second Advent. (For full comment on this see under the seventh church, Laodicea, Revelation. 3:20)

## **Promise to the overcomer**

***And he who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - ...***

Two kinds of works are featured in story of the church of Thyatira: first the deeds (the Greek word for *works* means *actions* or *deeds*) of Jezebel and her supporters, and secondly the works of Christ. The reward the works of Jezebel reaps is great tribulation:

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 59 (footnote). See also *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1911 ed., s.v. "Gnosticism". See also Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), Revelation 2:25.

<sup>82</sup> A.P. Cooke, *The Final Windup of Human History*, (Sydney, Self-published, 1985),

the reward the works of Christ garners is power over the nations. The believer is to keep Christ's works *unto the end*, that is, until the end of the individual believer's life.

*He who endures to the end shall be saved. Matthew 24:13*

What then are the works of Christ? They can be summed up by the following:

*He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also John 14:12*

*If you love me keep my commandments. John 14:15.*

*Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.  
Ecclesiastes 12:13.*

***... He shall rule them with a rod of iron: they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels - as I also have received from my Father v27***

During the Thyatiran period the nations that were dominated by spiritual Jezebel had power over the saints. The fact that one day the tables will be turned and the saints will have power and authority over those who have so cruelly misused them reveals the justice of God. In what sense will the saints then have authority over the nations? The word *nations* is a term that also applies to the *unsaved*, those who are outside of Christ – those who are not the people of God.

The saints will have power over the unsaved during the millennium when they engage in a work of judgment upon the earth's multitude of the lost.

*Do you not know that the saints will judge the (unsaved) world? I Corinthians 6:2*

*I saw thrones and they (the saints) that sat on them, and judgment was committed to them...and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.  
Revelation 20:4*

As the Psalmist sang under inspiration,

*Let the saints be joyful in glory...Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the written judgment: this honour have all His saints. Palms149:5-9.*

During the one thousand years following the Second Advent, one of the privileges granted to the saints will be the responsibility of determining the degree of punishment to be meted out when all stand before the judgment throne and are rewarded according to their works. The actual victims of persecution and martyrdom, which came at the instigation of Mother Church, will sit in judgment on kings, nobles and their underlings; deciding the extent of their persecutors' punishment before their eternal destruction (Revelation 20:12-15).

**...He shall rule them with a rod of iron...**

This is a reference to the shepherd's crook. At one end was attached a bar of iron to be used as a weapon of either defense or attack against any animal preying upon the flock. It was, in essence, an instrument of destruction. This phrase indicates therefore that the overcomers, because of their loyalty to Christ, will share in the final administration of justice against those who so cruelly oppressed them. This concept is confirmed by the remainder of the verse:

**....they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels - as I also have received from My Father...**

This promise to the overcomer was also given to Christ.

*I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. Psalms 2:8-9.*

These identical promises reveal that Christ shares His ultimate victory with His faithful people, especially those of Thyatira.

**...and I will give him the morning star. v28**

The morning star is a symbol of Christ.

*I am the bright and morning star Revelation. 22:17*

In the darkest hour of the night this star scintillates, set against the blackness of the heavens. It is a beautiful harbinger of the coming day. So it is with Jesus Christ - amid the darkness of the long night of sin He shines as a scintillating star, declaring to men that before long the night of sin will end and the day of everlasting righteousness and peace will be established.

But what is meant by the image of the overcomer being given the morning star? It conjures a picture of a brilliant and distinctive ornament which would be like the morning star against the black canvas of the heavens. Given that the great majority of the overcomers of the Thyatiran period were martyrs; such an adornment would be a most fitting reward.

Dr Doddridge comments on this verse:

*I will give... such lustre and glory (to the overcomer) that he shall shine in my presence like the morning star when its sprightly and cheerful beams break through the shades of the night and proclaim the approaching sun.<sup>83</sup>*

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<sup>83</sup> Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor* (London: Charles and Robert Baldwin, 1805), 909. See Revelation 2:28-29.

Another writer has declared concerning God's high regard for those who have been martyred for His cause.

*But God looked upon His faithful martyrs with great approbation. The Christians who lived in that fearful time were greatly beloved of Him, because they were willing to suffer for His sake. Every suffering endured by them increased their reward in heaven.*<sup>84</sup>

*The life that is sacrificed for me is preserved unto eternal glory*<sup>85</sup>

*Every martyr of Jesus has died a conqueror.*<sup>86</sup>

These Christian martyrs, although few in number, were immense with regard to their faith in God. As such they are more precious in His sight than a worldwide Christendom which bears the name of Christ and yet proves itself a coward in defense of His cause.<sup>87</sup>

***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. v29***

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<sup>84</sup> Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1882), 210.

<sup>85</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 669.

<sup>86</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1958), 77.

<sup>87</sup> Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* 225.

## Appendix A - Parallels between apostate Israel and the Church of Rome

<b>Apostate Israel</b>	<b>The Church of Rome</b>
Literal Israel	Spiritual Israel
The woman Jezebel	The church represented by a woman
Calls herself a prophetess or teacher (of Baal)	Calls itself the sole teacher of truth but is Spiritual Babylon
<i>A whore and a witch</i> (2 Kings 9:22)	A spiritual whore, and riddled with witchcraft
Baal - the sun god of Babylon	Spiritual Babylon's god is the same as old Babylon's
Jezebel married Ahab the king	Spiritual Babylon united with the state (Under Constantine)
Jezebel dominated the king	Spiritual Babylon dominated the political rulers
Through Ahab Jezebel led Israel into apostasy	Through the state, spiritual Babylon led the Christian church into apostasy
Jezebel, haughty and intolerant	Spiritual Babylon haughty and intolerant
Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord	Spiritual Babylon killed the true teachers of the faith
Jezebel installed the prophets of Baal	Spiritual Babylon replaced true teachers with apostates
Jezebel influenced Israel to idolatrous feasts that led to immoral rites, etc	Spiritual Babylon influenced the church to accept her cup of false doctrines making them spiritually drunk and guilty of spiritual adultery.
In Ahab's name, Jezebel destroyed many who stood in her way	In the name of the state, spiritual Babylon destroyed all in her way
Elijah appeared and called for repentance and reform	Special messengers appeared calling for repentance and reform <sup>71</sup>
Elijah predicted judgments on Ahab and Jezebel	Special messengers predicted judgments on spiritual Babylon
Three and half years of literal drought	Three and half prophetic years of spiritual drought
A remnant remained true	A remnant remained true
True teachers, etc hidden in caves	True teachers and believers hidden in wilderness
Punishment of Ahab and Jezebel	Punishment of false church and supporters...
Tribulation and Death	Tribulation and Death
Extinction of Ahab's family	Deadly wound – national ruin - eternal oblivion

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