

Faith Amid The Flames!

The Church Of Thyatira

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THE STIRRING STORY OF THE SAINTS OF THYATIRA

An Exposition of Revelation 2:18-29.

“Unto the angel of the church in Thyatira.”

This is the fourth of the seven churches of Revelation. It stands between the period when the church in the Roman empire became popular under Constantine the Great (from about 300-538 AD), and the church of the Reformation period after 1500 AD. This is the period embracing the Middle and Dark Ages in which the Papacy dominated Europe and the true church existed in the wilderness.

This is the central church period of the seven. Twelve verses of scripture are employed to describe it whereas the average number of verses employed to describe the other six churches is 6.5 verses. Thyatira also covers the longest and the most trying period of the Christian era.

THE TITLE CHRIST ASSUMES

“The Son of God.” Verse 18.

This is the sole use of this title in Revelation. Generally it is “Son of Man”. The term “Son of God” denotes 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 The Son of God had been replaced by the “son of perdition”.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 the good and the evil. The evil he will judge and destroy.

“His feet are like fine brass.”

Under Revelation 1:15 this expression is shown to represent the treading down in judgment of all who choose sin and rebellion. (1) How relevant was such a title for this church period, when the saints of God so unjustly suffered at the hands of Antichrist.

Where was the church of God during this period? This was the church described in Revelation 12 as having fled into the wilderness. (Verse 6, 14.) It was not the orthodox, publicly recognized professedly Christian church of the period. In that period, it was proclaimed that there was only one true church and that was the church of Rome. While there may have been a few true servants of God within it, it was not Christ’s church, it was the church represented by the woman of Revelation 17 arrayed in “purple and scarlet”.

Thyatira was noted for its production of purple and scarlet cloth. Its first convert was “Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira” Acts 16:12-14. It still exports purple and scarlet cloth. The church addressed under Thyatira was a church in opposition to the organization led by purple and scarlet ecclesiastics.

Those comprising the true church at this period consisted of various groups, some of whom were isolated in the wilderness regions of the then-known world. In the reign of the Emperor Justinian non-Catholics were compelled by law to become Catholics or have their land and goods confiscated and leave the empire. As a result the true Christians forsook their homes and amid massacre and flight left the areas of civilization of the Roman empire. This was in 538AD. (2) Except for the Church of the East, from this time on, the true church existed in scattered groups. These included the Celtic Christians of the British Isles, the Paulicians of Armenia, the Ethiopians of Africa, the original Waldenses of eastern Spain (3), the Waldenses of North Italy, the Albigenses of South and Western France, the Lollards of England and the Hussites of Bohemia. As Benedict in his history declares,

“Whenever therefore.. . the teams 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 the Catholics comprehended under the general name of Waldenses.” (4)

THE CELTIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

Evidence suggests that the Christian faith first entered Britain via the Galatians or Gauls, a section of the Celtic race who were converted to Christ by Saint Paul. The most memorable man in Ireland’s ecclesiastical history was St. Patrick (360 AD). He commenced his ministry about 390 AD and in 411 AD he was at the height of his remarkable career. Patrick founded many schools or colleges in Ireland. His Bible was the Latin Itala version, the same as the Waldensian and which was a translation from Lucian’s Textus Receptus. (5) The Bible schools developed into large universities. The church was splendidly organized.

In 430 AD Pope Celestine sent Bishop Palladius as bishop to the Irish but he was shown such disrespect that he soon withdrew. The most famous Celtic centers of learning were at Armagh, Clonmacnoise, Clonard and Bangor. At Armagh over 7000 students attended at one time. So famous did Ireland become that it was called “The Land of Saints and Scholars”. All these centers were based upon the Bible. Ireland led the world in the civilizing of mankind.

The marvelous educational system of the Celtic church, revised and better organized by Patrick, spread successfully over Europe until the Benedictine system, favored 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.” (6)

The Celtic church continued undisturbed in Ireland until 832 AD when Ireland was invaded by the Danes who attacked and destroyed the many educational centers of the Celtic Church and brought much of the church to ruin. Gradually the Danes accepted the Catholic form of Christianity and through this channel the Papacy entered Ireland and began to destroy the Celtic Church. When the Danes were expelled in 1014 AD the Irish were enmeshed by Catholicism.

The final blow to the Irish Celtic church was when Pope Adrian IV issued a bull authorizing Henry II of England to invade Ireland in 1171 AD. This invasion aided the Latin clergy in ridding Ireland of the Celtic pastors.

“When Henry II ruined both the political and the ecclesiastical independence of Ireland he also destroyed the valuable records which would clarify what the inner spiritual life and evangelical set-up of the Celtic church was 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.” (7)

THE CELTIC CHURCH IN WALES

The Gothic invasions of Western Rome were critical for the Celtic church. After the Romans withdrew from Britain, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded. (449 AD)

They drove the British and their Celtic church westward where it finally entrenched itself in Wales and became strong. In this period the name of King Arthur of Britain comes to light. According to Gibbon, he ably defended the Celtic church against the Anglo-Saxons. (8)

By 538 AD the Celtic church was led by Dinooth. (530-610) In 597 AD Pope Gregory I sent Augustin and 200 monks to Kent to establish the Catholic faith. The way had been prepared by arranging the marriage of a Frankish Roman Catholic princess to the King of Kent. Augustin established a superficial Catholic church, because when the king died, the so-called Christian Catholics lapsed into Paganism.

Other strategic marriages were arranged by Rome by which the Papacy was able to resist the efforts of the Celtic church among the English.

Up to this time, the centre 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, which meant that there were 2100 students at least. It was from Bangor that Colombanus and his 13 companions ventured forth to the continent to spread the Celtic faith. The learned Dinooth was the Celtic leader that headed the delegation in the confrontation with Augustin which revealed how much at variance the Celtic faith was with the apostate Roman. 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 who were praying nearby. However the Celtic church continued in Wales, independent of the Saxons, until the Norman invasion. William of Normandy was the Papal instrument in opposing and putting down 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.”(9)

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

CELTIC CHURCH IN SCOTLAND

The gospel was first taken to Scotland by Colomba, (531-607AD), an Irish prince and member of St. Patrick’s church. He was a product of the educational system of the Celtic church which at that time was the best in the world.

Colomba, with 200 associates, established a college on the Isle of Iona, off the western Scottish coast. His clan, situated in north-east Ireland, had conquered a large section of Western Caledonia, from whence it derived the name of Scotia or Scotland. Iona became a remarkable centre of learning and evangelization that made it famous for all time. Eighteen years of study were required before ordination. The Italic version was the Bible they used. Iona was a missionary centre for 641 years until destroyed by the Benedictine monks who drove out the Celtic saints.

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

“The Irish and 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 the 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.” (10)

Colomba labored in Scotland for 34 years. While the Celtic clergy began to submit to Rome by about 740 AD, 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. In 1130 the Celtic clergy were dispossessed of their lands and expelled. However, among many of the common people, the biblical teachings of Iona continued underground, fed by Waldensian and Wycliffian missionaries. The faith of Iona flowered once more in the Scottish Reformation of the sixteenth century. (11)

THE CELTIC CHURCH IN EUROPE 538 -700 AD.

The re-establishment of the Christian faith in Europe after the settlement of the Gothic tribes and the destructive influence of Clovis king of the Franks, commenced with the advent of Columbanus and thirteen companions.

Columbanus or Columban, (543-615 AD), was of the Irish church which had been established and nurtured by St. Patrick and which became a great missionary movement of that day. Columbanus was educated and trained for his work at the Celtic college at Bangor. In 573 AD with thirteen companions he was inspired to commence missionary work in Gaul. He set up schools, first in Gaul, then in Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Northern Italy. Not only did he implant the true faith amid the people, but he also brought education to benighted Europe.

In England and Scotland, the Irish missionaries were confronted by heathenism. In Europe they were opposed by a corrupt and debased Christianity. Their efforts were crowned with remarkable success as the Celtic faith began to spread throughout Northern Europe. At a time when Pope Gregory I was the enemy of learning, the Celtic schools became not only centers of the gospel, but of learning and of civilization. (12)

“There was a continual stream of missionaries from the churches of Ireland and Scotland, flowing toward the continental church.” (13)

“The Irish and Scottish Churches covered the British Isles and the continent of Europe with their thousands of missionary centers in a short period.” (14)

“Columben 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.” (15)

This mission continued for almost two hundred years when persecution commenced (733 AD). This divided the Celtic church in Europe into separate units, but they retained their faith and witness.

THE CELTIC CHURCH IN ENGLAND

The heathen Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded Britain in 449 AD. They drove the Britons and the Celtic church into the Western regions. It was Aiden, a Celtic missionary, who pioneered the gospel among the English. He was educated at Iona, the thriving and famous university of Columba. Aiden also established a centre of learning on the isle of Lindisfarne on the eastern coast of North England. This was modeled after Iona.

Celtic missionaries won two thirds of England to the Christian faith. It was Celtic Aiden not Augustin who was the Apostle to England. He commenced his ministry about 634 AD and labored for 17 years. He was succeeded by Finan who labored for ten years then Coleman who labored for three years. Monasteries or colleges were established at Melrose, Whitby and Tillbery.

“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] (16)

“Northumbrian Christianity spread over the southern kingdoms.”(17)

In 664 AD the Papacy through the Roman Catholic Queen of Northumbria brought a crisis to the Celtic church. As a result of the Council of Whitby, which was a confrontation of the Roman and Celtic churches, the king sided with Rome, which then gained the ascendancy in England. However the work of Aiden, Finan and Coleman, etc. was not 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.” (18)

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

THE CHURCH OF THE EAST 538-1500 AD

Not only had the Christian faith been proclaimed to the west of Palestine, but in harmony with Jesus’ command, the apostles had sallied forth to the north, the south and the east.

Toward the close of the second century Pope Victor I of the church of Rome excommunicated the churches of the East because they refused to accept the Papal pagan Easter. This led to the church in the east becoming independent of Rome and the west and of setting up its own organization and proclaiming the gospel in the vast lands of the east. This section of the Christian church has been called by various names. Many have called it the Nestorian church, but this is an incorrect term. There were four main groups -

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

These were all in agreement on the main points of faith, but 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. (19) Their first leader, or catholicos, was Papas (285 AD). At first they suffered great persecution especially from Pagan Persian rulers which produced many martyrs.

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, but this was closed by the Roman emperor Zeno because they refused to accept the apostate positions of the Catholic Church at Rome. The Assyrian church therefore moved the college to Nisibis, outside the boundary of the Roman Empire. Nisibis’ fame reached even to Oxford, Cambridge and Paris, as one of the greatest intellectual centers of the world. These Christians were the teachers of the Arabs. They used a Bible - unlike the Roman - called the Peshita, from the famous Syrian scholar called Lucian, from whom came the Textus Receptus. The church headquarters were located first at Seleucia, Iraq, and Christian Jews were predominant.

In early Christian times a vast population existed in central Asia with many cities connected by a system of roads and posts. This provided ease of travel for Christian missionaries. In 498 AD the Persian king, Kaved, took refuge with the Turks and Huns in central Asia.

There he found Christians who helped him regain his throne. The Assyrian Christians taught writing to the Turks and also to the Arabs. There is evidence that the Assyrian Christians also developed the alphabets of Central Asia and the Far East, such as the Mongolian, Manchu and the Soghdian. In Chinese Turkestan, thousands of manuscripts have been unearthed revealing that the Christian faith was once established in those areas. (20)

“In the sixth century ... 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 [leader] of Babylon.” (21)

In the period 500-575 AD the leader of the Church of the East was named Aba. During the Arab conquests about 650 AD, this church fared fairly well under the Arabs. When the Arabs set up their new capital at Baghdad the Assyrian Church also transferred its headquarters in 762 AD from Seleucia to Baghdad. (22)

The Arabs were very partial to the Assyrian Christians because of their educational system and also because of their outstanding medical knowledge. Many of these Christians were also employed in the Arab administration of government. (23)

By 1000 AD the bulk of the population of Syria, Iraq and Khurasan (North East Persia) were Christian. They had also made great progress in Central Asia. (24)

By 800 AD numerous missionaries were spreading the faith in India and China. According to one Jacobite writer, the Turks of farther Asia, the Tartars, who live in tents and have no towns, possess the Old and New Testaments in their own tongue. They are ruled by four kings under whom are over four hundred thousand families. All these obey the gospel. This is a total of eight million people.

In 1009 AD Abdisho from Khurasan reported to his leader that two hundred thousand Turks and Mongolians had accepted the gospel. (25)

In 800 AD there was a line of Christian kings in the depths of Scythia by the name of Prester John, Mingana declared that “The Church of the East was the greatest missionary church ever produced.” (26) 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? Because there came to the throne of the Mongols, a relative of Ghengis Khan who was a true Christian.

By 500 AD many Christian communities existed in India. This country had been a haven for persecuted Christians from Persia. Many Christians of the Roman Empire who had fled from persecution also went eastwards to Persia and then to India. (27) As Mingana declares -

“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.” (28)

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. They invented Krishna, a counterfeit Christ, which brought revival to Hinduism. (29)

“At the very date 535 AD. . . churches with a complete liturgy were then to be found in Ceylon, Malabar, Socotra and north west India [apparently identical with the Saint 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.” (30)

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. (31)

In 1500 AD however, when the Catholic Portuguese arrived, there soon followed the Jesuits, who as usual, commenced their diabolical Inquisition. In this way the true church in India was crushed. (32)

China

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). This stone memorial commemorated the advent of Christianity into China. At that time China ruled over most of Asia and its remarkable civilization was significantly influenced by the Church of the East. (33)

The so-called Nestorian monument in Chinese and Syriac languages testifies to the greatness 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.

“I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles that thou may be my salvation to the ends of the earth... Behold these shall come from far, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Sinim.” Isaiah 49:6, 12. [Sinim is China.]

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. (34)

“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.” (35)

“The clergy who led the Church of the East to victory were men of consecration and scholarship.”(36)

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.” (37)

As mentioned previously, in 1204 AD the Mongols began their remarkable conquest of Asia and east Europe. Ghenghis Khan and his son Ogatai unified the Oriental nations and opened the way for their advance in civilization. The three nephews of Ogatai succeeded him and their triumph over all the Oriental world coincided with the remarkable success of the gospel via the Assyrian church. These rulers were favorably disposed toward the Assyrian church because they desired their peoples to benefit from the medical learning and the outstanding business skills of the Christians. Under these favorable conditions it is understandable how Christianity spread throughout Asia and was numbered by the millions..

What became of the church of the East? Four events brought it to ruin -

1. Prosperity led to the undermining of the church. The early spirit of devotion declined and ceremonies replaced spiritual power.

Z. Tamerlane, the fierce and fanatical Moslem, led the Turks in their awesome conquest of all Asia from Russia to China. He was responsible for the destruction of much of the church of the East.

3. The destruction of vast populated areas by the sands of the desert. This area embraced Siberia, Turkestan and north China.

“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.” (38)

“On one occasion three hundred and sixty six cities were buried in twenty-four hours.”(39)

4. The arrival of the Jesuits in China and India with their notorious Portuguese Inquisition. (40)

THE TRUE FAITH IN EUROPE FROM 700 AD ONWARDS

723 AD The Englishman Boniface was sent to Europe by Pope Gregory III in order to counter the Celtic church and convert the Celtic saints to Romanism. (41) In 733 AD persecution against the Celtic church commenced. This was due to the ascendancy of catholic Charles Martel, who in 732 AD defeated the Moslems at Tours. The subjection of the Celtic church in Europe was completed by Charlemagne (800 AD). (42) However, remnants of believers continued in various areas of the continent.

864 AD. The Bulgarians were won to Christ by Greek and Paulician believers who were opposed to Rome. (43) The Paulicians were a large group of true believers who in this period began to migrate from Armenia and Asia Minor into various areas of Europe. The Paulicians have been grossly misrepresented by historians, but now they have been recognized as true Christians who withstood the apostasy of the day. They brought revival to the scattered remnants throughout Europe. (44) 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 their learning and holiness.

1025 AD. The trial of another group at Arras, France, who were 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, made 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 also the Waldenses. He publicly opposed the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, i.e. that the priest turns the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. (45)

1079 AD. Pope Gregory VII decreed that the Latin language be used in all churches in Moravia and Bohemia. This shut the door of truth to the people. (47)

1100 AD. The famous Waldensian “Nobla Lecon” (Noble Lesson) was written. It is a sublime presentation of the origin and the story of the plan of redemption. It is a contribution to world literature in the Romaunt language, from a persecuted and martyred people.” (46)

1104 AD. Peter de Bruys from the French Waldensian Valleys stirred Southern France by his biblical, apostolic preaching. Misrepresented as usual by Rome, finally he was 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 of people, 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. He was finally imprisoned and disappeared.

1150 AD. Arnold of Brescia, a powerful and eloquent preacher exposed the errors of the Papacy. He was far ahead of his age. He denounced the union of church and state. He preached in Switzerland, France, Germany and Italy. Even a church synod met to answer Arnold. He was finally burned to death, but he left behind numerous followers.

1175 AD. Peter Waldo of Lyons, France. A wealthy merchant who forsook his riches and proclaimed the gospel and the doctrines of the New Testament. He exposed the Church of Rome as “the man of sin” of 2 Thessalonians 2 and the beast of Revelation. He greatly revived and increased the number of Waldensians throughout Europe. Upon persecution he withdrew to Bohemia and his followers to the Waldensian Valleys. He stimulated the circulation of the scriptures. Rome has fraudulently branded Waldo as the founder of the Waldenses in order to hide the truth that there were numerous Christian dissenters against Rome centuries before Waldo’s time. (48)

The Albigenses

These were a numerous group of Christian dissenters who resided in the four provinces of Dauphine, Provence Languedoc and Gasconne in South France between the Cottian Alps in the east and the Pyrenees in the south-west. Though of Gaulish or Cis-Alpine nationality, they were identical in faith and doctrine to the Waldenses. (49)

The Waldenses first separated from the established church in the time of Sylvester, Bishop of Rome, and Constantine and the Council of Nicaea, 314-226 AD. They rapidly spread their faith throughout all Europe, but they were particularly numerous in the provinces of South France. Here they influenced the population to such a degree that this region of Narbonne-Gaul became a flourishing, enlightened and independent civilization. To their skilful land cultivation was added that of commerce, art, poetry and music, especially the troubadour or minstrel, many of whom were colporteurs and missionaries. They possessed the New Testament in their own Provencal language, 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 in striking contrast to that of the rest of the benighted peoples of Europe. Six Roman Catholic councils were conducted to counter the Albigenses, (50) from 1119 to 1229 AD, finally ending in the appalling crusade of extermination under Pope Innocent III. Altogether over one million were done to death.

“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.” (51)

REVIVAL IN ENGLAND

At the very time Innocent III was destroying the Albigenses of South France, England was beginning to revolt against the Papal yoke. In 1215, the Magna Carta had been signed in reaction to the Papal dominance of England. The Pope had annulled and declared void the Magna Carta. This was the beginning of England’s emancipation. As she cast off the Papal shackles she began to grow in power and wealth. (52)

It was in this setting that God raised up John Wycliffe (1324-1384). The English barons had begun to free England from the political power of the Papacy, now Wycliffe was to begin to free England from the Papacy’s spiritual power. This outstanding Englishman rose like a brilliant star amid the darkness of the Papal night. A scholar of Oxford university, he began lectures on the Bible in 1360 AD. Soon Wycliffe clashed with the friars - the ignorant and corrupt monks, Franciscans and Dominicans - “who did for the Papacy in the centuries that preceded the Reformation what the Jesuits have done for it in the centuries that have followed it”. These men 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 strongly attacked the Catholic eucharist or transubstantiation and brought to light many fundamentals of the gospel. (53)

Wycliffe leavened the whole land. He influenced scholars through Oxford, the laity through his Lutterworth pulpit, the parliament through debates and the court whose policy he helped to mould. He overthrew the doctrine of the temporal supremacy of the popes and the power of the anathema. Probably his greatest work 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 a highway, said his enemies, but one of them is a Wycliffe.” (54)

His disciples were called Lollards, probably from Peter Lollard, the Waldensian missionary whom McCabe declared “paved the way for Wycliffe in England”. (54) Wycliffe,

“Organized a band of preachers - simple, pious, earnest men - who knew the gospel and were willing to preach it at crossroads and market places, in city and village, and rural lane - everywhere, in short.” (55)

They,

“Traversed the kingdom, preaching the gospel.”

“Their countrymen flocked to their sermons the soldiers mingled with the civilians ready to defend the preacher... Several of the nobility joined their party. . .There followed, wherever the doctrine was received, a reformation of manners and in some places the purging of public worship by the revival of idolatrous symbols.” (54)

“Within ten years of the death of Wycliffe [1395] they petitioned parliament for a reformation in religion.”

But England was not yet ready and the authorities turned upon the Lollards and enacted the first law consigning heretics to the flames. The first martyr was William Sawtre, rector of Saint Orsyth, London. Though others followed, the Lollards kept preaching and “their growth was a torment to the clergy in England”.

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 conspirators - as men Riming at the destruction of society itself and so are to be hunted out and exterminated.” (56)

Despite oppression, the Lollards continued. Their martyrdoms and the edicts issued against them testify to their numbers and influence. They sowed the seed which finally bore fruit in the Protestant Reformation in England.

BOHEMIA

The teachings of Wycliffe developed into two streams -

1. Lollardism in Britain with imprisonment, stake and victory.
2. Hussitism in Bohemia with wars, victories, compromise with Rome and defeat, leaving a persecuted and scattered remnant.

Bohemia was a fertile field for the faith of Christ. Many persecuted Waldensians of the previous decades had found refuge there and 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 truth. These were John Militz, Conrad Stickna and Mathew Janovius. All were learned, eloquent and godly. With great power they publicly exposed the abuses of the clergy. Militz, after visiting Rome, wrote over a cardinal's door, "Antichrist is now come and sits in the church."

Persecution commenced compelling believers to worship in forests and caves. When dying, Janovius prophesied:

"The rage of the enemies of the truth now prevails against us, but it will not be forever; there shall arise one from among the common people, without sword or authority and against him they shall not be able to prevail." (57)

In the same period Bohemia was politically prepared for her chosen roll. 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 AD).

Of humble origin but of brilliant mind, Huss completed his education at the university of Prague where he then lectured and entered the Catholic priesthood in which he became an eminent preacher. About 1402 he was appointed preacher in the Chapel of Bethlehem, Prague. Because of the deplorable morality of the people, Huss was led to become the conscience of Prague as he proclaimed against the abuses of every class. Turning to scripture for authority he became absorbed in its truth and spirit. Thus was laid the foundation for the Protestant faith.

On top of this was the influence of the writings of Wycliffe which had been introduced into the university and the court and which were also being publicized by the powerful preaching of the Oxford graduate, Jerome, a Bohemian knight. When the reaction came, Huss temporarily departed from Prague, returning later to thunder more intensely against the tyrannical priesthood and the corrupt practices of the three men who were all posing as popes. He climaxed his attack by nailing "six errors" of Rome on the door of Bethlehem Chapel.

Bohemia was stirred. As Huss's biblical knowledge increased, he soon learned of further falsehoods of Rome and finally concluded that "the Pope and his court were members of Antichrist". Bohemia was divided, so Huss again voluntarily forsook Prague and preached among his own people.

At the Council of Constance (1414), Huss and Jerome were tried and condemned to the stake under despicable circumstances. Ere 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."(58)

Likewise with Jerome, in his final address he declared,

"In dying 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." (59)

The crime against these two men united all Bohemia - Catholic and anti Catholic - against the Papacy and its political supporters. Huss and Jerome's influence was greater now than while they lived. Their writings were studied as never before.

"Within four years the bulk of the nation had embraced the faith for which he [Huss] died."

The Bohemians resumed the use of the cup in Communion and conducted their services in the national language instead of Latin. In this they rejected the marks of papal submission. However, there were two.

groups among them. The Taborites, who rejected completely, papal authority, and made the scriptures their sole standard. The Calixtines, who remained nominal Catholics, though in heart opposed.

“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.” (60)

The Papacy called for the extermination of the Bohemian nation and Emperor Sigismund with several German states prepared to perpetrate the crime. But at the right time God had the man to organize and lead the Bohemians, or Hussites, as they were now called.

This was John Troeznowski or Ziska, considered to be the greatest military general of all time. After putting down the Catholic resistance in Bohemia, the numerous and magnificent churches and monasteries were wrecked and their immense wealth was confiscated for defense. Ziska then led the Hussites' military campaigns of self-preservation that continued for eighteen years. He was succeeded by Procopius. Against overwhelming odds the Hussites were never defeated. 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. (61)

As usual, Rome changed her tactics. Instead of military confrontation she resorted to the wiles of councils. The Hussites, anxious for peace, compromised and signed The Compactata which gave a feeble guarantee of Bohemian faith and liberties. From this compromise with Rome, the prestige of Bohemia waned. They gained no more victories. The tide of national prosperity began to recede. Soon they began to war among themselves. Sigismund the Catholic emperor took the throne, broke his oath, and began the restoration of the Papacy. The Taborites resorted to their city and territory of Tabor, where they flourished.

Forty years after the martyrdom of Huss and Jerome, because of the surrounding error that again appeared to cover the earth, they formed themselves into a separate church called “United Brethren”. This aroused bitter enmity and opposition from the rest of their countrymen. As a result, 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 around 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”. (62)

They wondered whether they were alone. Were they the only witnesses remaining in the earth? They sent messengers secretly to various countries of Europe to enquire. In the darkness covering the earth they found isolated believers, like them, objects of persecution. However, in the Cottian Alps of North Italy, they found an ancient church based upon the word of God, in protest against the corruptions of Rome. The Taborites opened communication with the Waldenses and found that in belief, ordination and ceremonies they were in agreement. This brought great joy to the Taborites and inspired them to missionary activity, with an increase of their congregations. They ever remembered the predictions of Huss and repeated by Jerome, that a hundred years would pass before the day would break. This kept their hopes alive in the night of persecution. When the century ended there were 200 churches of the “United Brethren” in Bohemia and Moravia. From them later came the Moravians, the intrepid missionaries of the eighteenth century.

But within the church of Rome itself, noble men rose up and witnessed against their mother church. Their blood stained the scaffolds and their ashes so often were scattered to the winds. Thomas Conecte, a Carmelite friar, appeared in Flanders and publicly confessed to 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.” (63)

Cardinal Andrew, Archbishop of Crayn, the emperor's ambassador to Rome was struck with dismay when he discovered that the papal sanctity was mere fiction. He addressed Pope Sixtus IV calling for reform but all he received was mockery and persecution. 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.”

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 maybe at our very doors, to bring back the church to its pristine condition.” (64)

What an astounding prediction, given in the very period of Luther's birth. A brilliant light was the Dominican monk, Jerome Savanorola of Florence (1452-1498). Aroused by the corruptions of the church, he preached with great power and conviction. He taught justification by faith and passionately uplifted the crucified Christ before the people. His words were “like flashes of lightning and reverberations of thunder”. He concluded that the Papacy was Babylon and urged the people to “fly far from Babylon”. Rome in her usual manner arrested, tortured and publicly burnt this superbly gifted, scholarly and saintly man of forty-six years, casting his ashes into the river Arno. A bronze plaque in the square where he was executed reads, “By Unrighteous Sentence”. His death was not in vain. It later convinced Luther that reform of the Church of Rome was hopeless. (65)

In 1484 John Lallier a doctor of the Sorbonne stood against the corrupt and erroneous teachings of Rome. He urged the keeping of the commandments of God and not those of the pope. He said,

“They have ruined the church by their crafty devices... since the time of Sylvester [320 AD] the Roman church is no longer the church of Christ.” (66)

John of Wesalia, Doctor of Divinity of Erfurt, attacked Rome's errors and proclaimed the Bible as the sole source of faith. “It is by the grace of God alone that the elect are saved,” he boldly preached, “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. In his old age he was condemned by the Inquisition and perished in their dungeons in 1482.

Another scholar reckoned by some to be the most remarkable forerunner of the Reformation was John Wessel, 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 works sooner, my enemies might have thought that I had derived everything from Wessel, so much are we of one mind.” (67)

Voices continued to multiply indicating that soon the sun was to arise, 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.” (68)

Another monk of the Franciscans was John Hilten in Eisenach. He was led to study the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. He wrote a commentary on them and censured the flagrant abuses of his fellow monks. They imprisoned him in the filthy dungeon below the monastery in 1477. For over 20 years he was imprisoned. Before death, he called the supervisor who abused him because of his doctrines. Hilten said to him,

“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.” (68)

A few years earlier, a few miles away, Martin Luther was born and in 1517 AD he took his stand for Christ and defied the Pope and all he stood for.

We suggest that this ended the period of the church of Thyatira, the longest period of all the seven churches, 538-1517 AD, around one thousand years.

In the light of the above history of this church period, it is significant to notice the message of Christ to his people in this dark and lengthy period.

“I know thy works and charity [love] and service and faith and thy patience and thy works and the last [works] to be more than the first.” Verse 19.

Considering the circumstances of the Thyatiran period, such a list of commendations is remarkable. Of all the seven churches, Thyatira stands second in the abundance of its witness for Christ. The only other church period that excels it is the Ephesian or apostolic church period which witnessed under the power of Pentecost.

Christ highlights the fact that the labors of believers in the latter part of this period were more than in the first or earlier part. The latter part of this period was when the Papacy was more dominant, more autocratic and relentless in her opposition to truth. But in response to this situation, the saints were inspired to greater efforts for Christ. However, Christ reminds his people that there were a few failings among them. This is recorded for the benefit of future believers.

“You suffer that woman Jezebel which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols.” Verse 20.

Who was Jezebel? The key to understanding the book of Revelation is in ascertaining the Old Testament source from which the imagery is drawn. Revelation is based on the Old Testament. The name Jezebel is associated with King Ahab and the prophet Elijah (69) at a critical period in the history of Israel about 900 BC. Jezebel was the daughter of the King of Sidon who was the priest of Baal or pagan Sun worship. Jezebel, a pagan princess, married Ahab King of Israel and by her dominating influence led Ahab to set up the corrupt apostate worship of Baal. This led the majority of Israel into apostasy.

The prophet Elijah was raised up by God to warn and expose Baal worship and to call Israel to repentance and reform. A devastating drought of 3.5 years was visited upon Israel and Jezebel turned on the faithful Israelites in persecution and slaughter, at the same time strengthening the grip of Baal upon the people. Ahab and Jezebel rejected the prophet’s call and Elijah predicted the dire results that would come to Ahab, Jezebel and their family. At Mt. Carmel, Baal worship was publicly exposed by Elijah and Israel began to turn away from Baal worship. Finally, the total family of Ahab and Jezebel were destroyed in the exact manner predicted.

This dramatic episode in Israel’s history is a type or picture of the experience to befall spiritual Israel in the Christian era. In prophecy a woman denotes a religious body or church. (70) A corrupt woman denotes the church or religious organization of Satan. Jezebel was a pagan sun worshipper, a prophetess or teacher of it; thus she represents a religious organization of Satan that at heart is pagan sun worship. In other words, it would be of Babylonian origin. Jezebel is identical with the harlot church of Revelation 17 who is attired in purple and scarlet, the exact colors Thyatira produced and for which she was famous. (71)

The following outline will serve to show how the experience of ancient Israel with Jezebel is typical of what has befallen the Christian

PARALLELS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND CHRISTIAN CHURCH

ISRAEL

1. Literal Israel
2. That woman Jezebel
3. Calls herself a prophetess or teacher (of Baal).
4. A whore and a witch (2 Kings 9:22.)
5. Baal-the Sun god of Babylon,
6. Jezebel married Ahab the king
7. Jezebel dominated the king.
8. Through Ahab Jezebel led Israel into apostasy.
9. Jezebel, haughty and intolerant.
10. Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord.
11. Jezebel installed the prophets of Baal.
12. Jezebel influenced Israel to idolatrous feasts that led to immoral rites, etc.
13. In Ahab's name, Jezebel destroyed any who stood in her way.
14. Elijah appeared and called for repentance and reform.
15. Elijah predicted judgments.
16. Three and half years of literal drought.
17. A remnant remained true.
18. True teachers, etc. hidden in caves.
19. Punishment of Jezebel and Ahab.
20. Tribulation and Death.
21. Extinction of Ahab's family.

CHRISTIAN CHURCH

1. Spiritual Israel
2. A religious organization
3. Calls itself the sole teacher of truth but is Spiritual Babylon.
4. A spiritual whore, and riddled with witchcraft.
5. Spiritual Babylon's god is same as old Babylonian's.
6. Spiritual Babylon united with the state (Constantine).
7. Spiritual Babylon dominated political rulers.
8. Through the state spiritual Babylon led the Christian church into apostasy.
9. Spiritual Babylon haughty and intolerant.
10. Spiritual Babylon killed the true teachers of the faith.
11. Spiritual Babylon replaced true teachers with apostates.
12. Spiritual Babylon influenced the church to accept her cup of false doctrines making them spiritually drunk and guilty of spiritual adultery.
13. In the name of the state, spiritual Babylon destroyed any who stood in her way.
14. Special messengers appeared warning of spiritual Babylon's apostasy, calling for repentance and reform. (72)
15. Special messengers predicted judgments.
16. Three and half prophetic years of spiritual drought.
17. A faithful remnant remained true.
18. True teachers and believers hidden in wilderness.
19. Punishment of false church and supporters...
20. Tribulation and Death.
21. Deadly Wound - National Ruin - Eternal Oblivion.

Christ's Complaint Regarding Thyatira

“Thou suffers 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 to compromise. This was especially so of some of the religious teachers. With the passing of time resistance to error and popular beliefs lessened, and the errors of Rome infiltrated some groups of the faithful. Writing of the Celtic Church in Ireland, B.G. Wilkinson says,

“So the Celtic Church in Ireland succumbed more or less to papal practices.” (73)

“Finally, a traitor to the Celtic Church was found in Celsus, the Celtic archbishop of Armagh, who contrived to have Malachy, a youth instructed in the continental school of Bernard of Clairvaux, deeply permeated by papal teaching, his successor. This Malachy finally reduced Ireland beneath the supremacy of Rome and introduced Roman discipline.” (74)

Of the Celtic Church in Scotland the same scholar wrote,

“Within the one hundred and twenty-five years after the death of Columba, the Picts had been swayed enough by the mighty influence of Rome to adopt the Roman Easter.” (75)

Of the Church of the East, Wilkinson again declares,

“Because of the doctrines passed on by the Council of Chalcedon [451 AD] 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.” (76)

Of the Waldensian church, Wilkinson, on the authority of J.A. Wylie, says,

“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 University of Paris.” (77)

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

“And I gave her space [or time] to repent of her fornication and she repented not.” Verse 21.

The period of Thyatira continued for approximately one thousand years, the longest of the seven churches but in spite of numerous voices raised from within the Papacy, as well as from without, she refused to repent and reform. The moral corruption and apostasy continued to increase until finally millions of her adherents in disgust turned their backs on Mother Church in the Protestant Reformation.

“Behold, I will cast her into a bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds, and I will kill her children with death.” Verses 22, 23a.

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

“He is chastened also with pain upon his bed.” Job 33:19.

“For the bed is shorter than 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 them... into great tribulation.”

The imagery is borrowed from the Old Testament account of the family of Ahab and Jezebel. In response to the message of doom pronounced by Elijah, Ahab displayed a form of repentance and humility, and God delayed the visitation of justice.

“I will not bring the evil in his [Ahab’s] days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house.” 1 Kings 21:27-29.

This was fulfilled upon Ahaziah the son of Ahab who took the throne upon Ahab’s death. (2 Kings 22:51-53.) The manner of fulfillment of the prediction was in Ahaziah being injured by a fall and being confined to his bed - his deathbed. In his affliction Ahaziah planned to consult the pagan god Baalzebub but Elijah declared in response,

“Thou shall not come dawn from that bed ...but shall surely die.”

This was repeated three times. (2 Kings 1:4, 6, 16)

“So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.” Verse 17.

Did the apostate church and those united illicitly with her suffer affliction or tribulation or death? Maybe this prediction could be applied to the Papacy when she received the deadly wound in 1798 AD? She certainly was afflicted when her political power was torn from her and she lost all support from the political kingdoms of the world. But what of the prediction of “great tribulation” for those who illicitly were in union with Rome? This refers to the political rulers or kingdoms of Europe. During the early Thyatiran period all European powers supported the Papacy. However, some European kingdoms underwent a form of repentance and threw off the papal yoke and became Protestant. These involved England, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark and Scandinavia. On the other hand, the European kingdoms that continued their support of the Papacy finally did suffer affliction or tribulation. These were Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, etc. These powers by their support of the Papacy were bled of their wealth and their thrones, or dynasties were overthrown.

“I will kill her children with death.” Verse 23.

In the Old Testament source on which this is based, the instruction to King Jehu was,

“Thou shall smite the house of Ahab...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 Verses 10-37; 10:1-28.]

Who are Jezebel’s children? The seed, or children of God’s woman of Revelation 12:17, are those who are faithful followers. We suggest that the children of the Church of Rome would be her faithful supporters. In what way would they be killed with death? Translators interpret this expression in different ways “With pestilence.” RSV.

“Her children shall I exterminate.” Moffatt.

“Thoroughly exterminating them.” Amplified N.T.

It is claimed that this expression is a “Hebraism” denoting “to slay with most sure and awful death”. (78) In the light of the Old Testament type where God decreed the extermination of the family of Ahab, we suggest that the thought indicated is extermination. If this application is correct, what a warning this is as to where we place our religious allegiance. The man who clings to a false system of religion is warned in the above scripture that for him there is no future - no eternal life, but ultimate extermination.

It is informative to notice that the church period of Thyatira corresponds with the fourth or pale horseman of Revelation 6:8. Upon the pale horse death rode and hell (grave) followed and power was given to kill with sword, hunger, death and beasts. This was abundantly fulfilled in the same period -Thyatira- of Papal supremacy when millions of believers were martyred. It was literal death to the saints but it was spiritual death for the followers of the false church. (79)

“And all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts: and I will give unto everyone of you according to your works.” Verse 23.

The thought appears to be that all the churches have witnessed, or know of the visitation of “death” upon the followers of Jezebel, and realize it is a display of God’s justice. He reads the motives of men and metes out justice according to their works. This suggests that an experience has befallen the followers of Jezebel in which “death” in some drastic form has overtaken them. Some believe that this may refer to the terrible visitation of the “Black Death” during 1348-51 AD.

“Hecker estimates a total of 25,000,000 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.” (80)

“Unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine [teaching] and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come.” Verses 24, 25.

The “doctrine” or teaching undoubtedly refers to the teaching of Jezebel of verse 20,

“To teach and to seduce my servants to commit [spiritual] fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols.” [i.e. to absorb pagan idolatrous beliefs.] No doubt this instruction applies to those who had not come under the influence of Jezebel in this period. There were some sections of the true church existing in areas not controlled by Rome. These included branches of the Church of the East or the Assyrian Church.

These people probably would not have known “the depths of Satan”. What are the depths of Satan? They are associated with the doctrines of Jezebel. From whence came the doctrines of Jezebel? The philosophy, teachings and practices of Sun worship came from Babylon. This was the source of all idolatry, astrology, witchcraft, etc. (81)

It was a religion invented by Lucifer, Babylon’s invisible king, (**Isaiah** 14:4, 12-14) in order to counterfeit the true faith and delude mankind. It was deeply involved in the occult, and frequently changed its front. In Greece, one aspect of Babylonian Sun worship had developed into a form called Gnosticism. They described the inner or hidden meanings of their philosophy as “the depth” or “the deep things of God”, (82) In this verse Christ fittingly declares their doctrine to be “the depths of Satan”.

“I will put on you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.” Verses 24, 25. All that heaven requires is for the believer to be faithful to the light of truth that he already has. We are judged only on what we know or could have known.

“To him that knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin.” James 4:17.

“That servant which knew his lord’s will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not-shall be beaten with few stripes.” Luke 12:47, 48.

“Hold fast till I come.”

This expression of Christ coming is repeated six times in connection with the seven churches. Generally, it appears that the expression refers to Christ coming to each particular church in judgment, not necessarily in the Second Advent. (For full comment on this, see under the seventh church, Laodicea, Revelation 3:20.)

“He that overcomes and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.” Verse 26.

Two kinds of “works” are featured here. First the deeds (Greek = works) of Jezebel and her supporters, and the works of Christ. The reward for the works of Jezebel is “great tribulation”. The reward for the works of Christ is “power over the nations”. But the believer is to keep Christ’s works “unto the end” i.e., to the end of his life.

“He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved.” Matthew 24:13.

What are the works of Christ? They are summed up as follows:

“He that believes in me, the works that I do, shall he do also.”

“If you love me keep my commandments.” John 14:12, 15.

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

The Overcomer’s Reward

“I will give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. Verses 26,27.

In the Thyatiran period the nations dominated by spiritual Jezebel had power over the saints. One day the tables will be turned and the saints will have power or authority over those who have so cruelly misused them. Here is revealed the justice of God. When will the saints have authority over the nations or the unsaved? The word “nations” is a term that also applies to those who are outside of Christ - those who are not God’s people.

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

“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” [unsaved world] 1 Corinthians 6:2.

“I saw thrones and they [the saints] sat upon them and judgment was given unto them ...and they lived and reigned with Christ 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 [nations] and punishments upon the people. To bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron. To execute upon them the judgment written: this honor have all the saints.” Psalm 149:5-9.

During the one thousand years after 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 very victims of the kings, nobles, and people who so cruelly persecuted and martyred them at the instigation of “Mother Church” will sit in judgment over them and decide the extent of their punishment before they are eternally destroyed. (Revelation 20:12-15.)

“He shall rule them with a rod of iron.”

This is a reference to the shepherd’s crook. On its other end was a length of iron which was used as a weapon of defense or attack against any preying upon the flock. It was an instrument of destruction. It denotes that the overcomers will share in the final administration of justice against those who so cruelly oppressed them, because of their loyalty to Christ. This is confirmed by the remainder of the verse: “as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers.”

“Even as I received of my Father.”

The promise to the overcomer was also given to Christ.

“I will give thee the heathen for your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shall break them with a rod of iron, thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Psalm 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.” Verse 28.

The “morning star”, is used as a symbol of Christ.

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

In the darkest hour of the night this star scintillates against the blackness of the heavens. It is a beautiful harbinger of the coming day. So with Jesus Christ. Amid the darkness of the long night of sin he shines as a scintillating star, declaring to men that ere long the night of sin will end and the day of everlasting righteousness and peace will be ushered in.

But what is meant by the overcomer being given the morning star? We suggest that it denotes a bright, brilliant and distinctive ornament that would be like the morning star against the black background of the sky. When we recall that the great majority of the overcomers of the Thyatiran period were martyrs, such an adornment would be most fitting. As Dr. Doddridge comments on this verse:

“I will give such luster and glory [to the overcomer] that he shall shine in my presence like the morning star when its sprightly and cheerful teams break through the shades of the night and proclaim the approaching sun.” (84)

Another writer has declared concerning God’s high regard for His martyrs:

“God looked upon his faithful martyrs with great approbation. The Christians were greatly beloved of Him because they were willing to suffer for His sake. Every suffering endured increased their reward in heaven.” (85)

“The life that is sacrificed for me is preserved unto eternal glory.” (86)

“Every martyr of Jesus has died conqueror.” (87)

“The few Christians [martyrs] were strong in God and more precious in his sight than half a world who bear the name of Christ and yet are cowards in his cause.” (88)

“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said to the churches.” verse 29.

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