

Church History

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From Mountaintop to Mountaintop – Introduction

Lesson 1

A. Introduction

This study begins with the ascension of Christ, probably from the Mount of Olives in AD 30, (Acts 1:9) and ends with the return of Christ on the same mountain some time in the future (Revelation 19:11-16, Zechariah 14:1-9).

Writers of Church History do not completely agree about how to divide the different periods of Church History. Some divide it by events concerning important persons, e.g. the ordination of the first Pope in AD 590, or the time Martin Luther nailed his thesis onto the church door in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517. Others prefer to divide the periods according to important events in history which had decisive effects on church life, e.g. the Edict of Constantine in AD 313, or the Peace of Westphalia 1646.

However, the most significant outline of Church History is found in the Book of Revelation, where the different church periods are outlined in a prophetic way.

In Chapter one, we find the introduction to the Dispensation of the Church, also called the Dispensation of Grace. Chapters two and three give a prophetic outline of general Church History. Thereafter the Book of Revelation is silent about the church until chapter 19, where the Marriage of the Lamb is mentioned and Christ returns to the Mount of Olives at which time He shall triumph in the Battle of Armageddon – the final battle of this dispensation – and will set up the long awaited Kingdom of Peace, the Millennium.

Church History is not just another subject to be learned in Bible schools or other educational institutions, but it is historical information concerning an ongoing eternal process which you and I are a part of and in which we, whether we like it or not, are playing a part. The important thing is that we find our part and that we play it wisely.

B. What is a church?

The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ecclesia”, which means a group of people called out for a special purpose. It is usually translated “congregation” or “assembly”. The true church of Christ consists of all who believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and have accepted Him as their personal Saviour.

Jesus said, "I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it".
Matthew 16:18.

Because many of the writers of church history were theologians who did not have the vision of the first church of Christ in the book of Acts and the letters of Paul concerning the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Signs Following and the Ministry Gifts, their presentations have been one-sided. As we do research in history, we discover that God always had a church on earth, which He said was "His church". There has always been a Spirit-filled church (or churches) that sought the power of the first church. This church has always

suffered persecution, been misunderstood and rejected, its members being called false teachers, fanatics or heretics. Their vision and movements have been neglected in the overall presentation of church history. We shall endeavour to trace them and mention them as we proceed.

Going through our study, we shall see that God was very aware of this, and in His messages to the churches in Revelation chapters two and three, He clearly states this difference by His various **commendations** and **rebukes**.

C. What is the purpose of the church?

The purpose of the Church is to bring the message of Salvation to a world lost in sin.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life", John 3:16.

D. The time of the church

Due to various changes of calendars we cannot be sure if our calendar is exactly correct but, undoubtedly, we live in the End Times. A monk named Dionysus Exiguus introduced our calendar in AD 525. It replaced the Roman calendar and was finally accepted throughout the world.

E. The seven churches of Asia

The Emperor Domitian exiled the Apostle John to the island of Patmos because of his faith. Here at the age of 90 he received messages from the Lord to the churches in Asia Minor. These messages became the last book in our Bible, the Book of Revelation, and they have four applications:

1. They were specific messages to the churches at the time of the writer.
2. They exposed the spiritual conditions in those particular churches.
3. They were messages to all believers throughout the entire church age.
4. They were a prophetic outline of Church History.

Chronological outline of the seven churches in Asia. (Revelation 1)

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| EPHESUS | The Apostolic Church | AD |
| | From the Ascension of Christ | 30 |
| | To the Death of John | 100 |
| SMYRNA | The Persecuted Church | |
| | From the Burning of Rome | 64 |
| | To the Edict of Constantine | 313 |
| PERGAMOS | The Imperial (State) Church | |
| | From the Edict of Constantine | 313 |
| | To the Fall of Rome | 476 |
| THYATIRA | The Medieval Church | |

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|------|
| | From the Fall of Rome | 476 |
| | To the Fall of Constantinople | 1453 |
| SARDIS | The Reformation Church | |
| | From the Fall of Constantinople | 1453 |
| | To the Peace of Westphalia | 1648 |
| PHILADELPHIA | The Mission Church | |
| | From the Peace of Westphalia | 1648 |
| | To the First World War | 1914 |
| LAODICEA | The End Time Church | |
| | From the First World War | 1914 |
| | To the Millennium | ?? |

F. The seven churches of the revelation in prophecy and history

Let us look at the resurrected and glorified Jesus as He appears in the Book of Revelation chapter one and in the course of history according to chapters two and three.

His person:

1. He who is, was and is coming.
2. The faithful witness.
3. The firstborn from the dead.
4. The ruler of the Kings of the earth.
5. He loves us.
6. He has freed us from our sins.
7. He has bought us with His blood.
8. He has made us to be a kingdom and priests before God.
9. He is coming with the clouds.
10. He is the Beginning and the End.

His description:

1. One like a Son of Man.
2. He walked among the lamp stands.
3. His eyes were as blazing fire.
4. His feet were like bronze.
5. His voice was like the sound of rushing waters.
6. He holds the seven stars.
7. In His mouth was a sharp sword.
8. His face: Shining like the sun.
9. He is the Living One.
10. He has the keys of death and Hades.

Mysteries:

1. The seven lamp stands are the seven churches.
2. The seven stars are the angels (leaders) of these churches.

The Ephesus Period – The Apostolic Church

Lesson 2

THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS (Revelation 2:1-7)

TIME: From the ascension of Christ (AD 30) to the death of the Apostle John (AD 100).

CHRIST: Christ is portrayed as the one who holds the seven stars (His servants) in His hand.

EXHORTATION: “Hear what the Spirit says to the Churches!” This exhortation was given to every period of the church.

PRAISE: Good works. Endurance. Resisting evil. Spiritual maturity. Sound discernment. “You have tried them who call themselves apostles, but are not”.

PROMISES: You shall eat from the Tree of Life.

REBUKE: You have left your first love.

CHALLENGE: Remember from where you have fallen – repent.

WARNING: I will remove your candlestick.

A. Introduction

Ephesus was an important town on the west coast of Asia Minor and was given the name of honour – **The Light of Asia**. The Ephesians worshipped the Asian goddess **Artemis**, also called **Diana**. The Artemis temple was reckoned to be one of the wonders of the world. Another place of worship was the **Augusteum**, which was dedicated to Emperor worship. The range of worldly entertainment was great and it is estimated that the theatre of Ephesus could seat approximately 25000 spectators.

This time is called **The Apostolic Period** because it was during this time that the 12 Apostles of the Lamb lived and worked. This period ended with the death of the last apostle, John.

The features of the Ephesian Church are more prominent in this period than in any other. There are some who teach that the apostolic message and practice came to an end with the death of the Apostle John, but it is not so. It is evident that it has continued more or less visible throughout the church age up to today and is still carrying on.

B. The world the disciples had to face

1. **Judaism**. Judaism was enemy number one, ready to attack the newborn church. The leading people of Israel, in co-operation with the Roman Empire, had crucified Christ. The Jewish leaders were:

- a) **The Pharisees (= the separated ones)** originated from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah at the return from Babylon, when a new and separate priesthood was established. They believed in the immortality of the soul and the punishment of the wicked. They also believed in the resurrection of the dead, in angels and that everything depended on God. Their political outlook was of course purely Jewish, and they avoided contact with non-Pharisees, Samaritans and Gentiles

through every means. They adhered strictly to the Law of Moses and practised circumcision.

- b) **The Sadducees** had their name from **Zadok**, the High Priest at the time of David from the line of Aaron. They were aristocrats and high priestly families belonged to them. In contrast with the Pharisees, they did not believe in bodily resurrection.

2. **The Roman Empire.** In 63 BC the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar conquered Jerusalem and established Roman rule in Palestine. This was the fourth kingdom which conquered Israel according to the prophecy of Daniel. Israel was still in subjection to Rome when Christ was born and during the lifetime of the Apostles.

- a) **Heathenism.** From the time of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel, there arose an apostate religion that, over the following centuries, spread in various forms from Babylon to the surrounding areas and even to Egypt, Greece and Rome. They had a great variety of their own gods – a god for almost anything.

These gods were the **foreign gods** (Jeremiah 2:25) which the people of Israel often worshipped in their backslidden state, in spite of warnings from God, e.g. **Baal** (Jeremiah 2:8), **Tammuz** (Ezekiel 8:14) and the **Queen of Heaven** (Jeremiah 7:18).

It was those ancient Babylonian gods (but with Egyptian, Greek and Roman names respectively), for example **Artemis, Diana, Osiris, Isis, Jupiter, Apollos, Zeus** and others, that the newborn church had to face.

- b) **Emperor worship** was one of the great customs in the Roman Empire. Some Roman Emperors erected statues of themselves and demanded to be worshipped as gods. Refusal to do so could provoke strong persecution – even to the death penalty. Emperor worship was inherited from the old Babylonian Empire. We remember that Daniel's three friends were thrown into the furnace because they would not worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar.

- c) **The Greek Philosophers (Acts 17:18).**

The Stoics were founded about 280 BC. They had high moral standards and their ethical system was close to that of Christianity. Their attitude was that of pride, independence and finally cosmic ruin, whereas Christianity is based on humility, faith and a personal resurrection.

The Epicureans, contrary to the Stoics, taught that happiness and pleasure are life's highest goals. Their outlook was materialistic and experience took preference over reason.

C. The beginning of the church

The Mission Command was probably given on the Mount of Olives on the day when Jesus ascended to Heaven. He said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel ...", Mark 16:15. A promise was given to them: "Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit within not many days", followed by the command, "Wait in Jerusalem until you have received power from on high", Acts 1:1-8.

The Church began in Jerusalem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Upper Room and Solomon's Porch in the Temple were the headquarters of the early church. After Jesus was taken up, His faithful disciples returned to Jerusalem where they prayed and waited – as He had said that they should – for ten days until the Holy Spirit fell upon them so powerfully that tongues of fire were visible on their heads and they spoke with new tongues. Multitudes of the people were confused, but the result was that 3000 people were saved and baptised. This event is recorded in Acts chapter two.

We can truly say that the first church was:

1. An obedient church.
2. An active church.
3. A praying church.
4. A Spirit-filled church.

What effect did the infilling of the Holy Spirit have?

1. It had an illuminating effect. It enlightened the mind of the believers, so that they had a better understanding of the Scriptures, and it confirmed that Christ had arrived at the right hand of His Father just as He had said He would.
2. It gave them boldness and power. Previously they had been sitting behind locked doors in fear; now they stood boldly and openly proclaimed the risen Christ to the same crowd who had cried "Crucify Him" two months earlier.
3. It gave them power to perform miracles.

Church Membership: The members of the Church were all Jews or Jewish proselytes. We can roughly divide them into three categories:

1. **The Hebrews** were those whose ancestors had dwelt in Palestine and were of pure Israeli descent.
2. **The Hellenists**, also called "the Grecian Jews", were Jews whose homes and ancestry were in foreign lands. Many of them had settled in Palestine. The name "Hellenist" comes from "Hellen", which is the Greek name for Greece.

After Alexander the Great of Greece, Greek became the common language of the time, just like English is one of the most commonly spoken languages today. The New Testament was written in Greek.

We find both groups mentioned in Acts 6:1 where the Grecians (Hellenists) murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily administrations.

3. **The Proselytes** were Gentiles who had renounced heathenism, embraced the Jewish Law and had entered the Jewish religion receiving the rite of circumcision. One of the first deacons, Nicholas, was a proselyte. Acts 6:5.

Leadership and Government: Very little government was needed in the first church. The members were all in one city, of one race and submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is apparent that Peter was their spokesman as a result of his leadership qualities and his special calling.

Doctrines: In the beginning the church had a simple theology. The letters of Paul, Peter and the other writers had not yet been written. Let us remember what old Simeon had said about Jesus, "He, Jesus, shall be a sign that shall be spoken against". Luke 2:34. The three main points in the message of the apostles were to this effect:

1. **Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the Messiah.**

This statement caused much persecution. A Jew had to realise that the Jews had crucified the Messiah, before he could accept this to be true. Peter proclaimed, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ", Acts 2:36. We must understand the difference between the names, Jesus and Christ. "Jesus of Nazareth" refers only to His name and to the town where He lived. "Christ" means "The Anointed", the long awaited Messiah.

2. **The resurrection of Christ.**

The resurrection of Christ was the essence of their preaching. It was the proof that He was the Son of God and the Messiah. This message caused an uproar, and fear and hatred from those who would not admit their sins and would not receive the message. Peter proclaimed, "God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him", Acts 2:24. Later this became the dividing point between Christianity and other religions.

Read Acts 3:12-26.

3. **The return of Christ.**

"He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He has promised long ago through His holy prophets", Acts 3:20-21. The Return of Christ has been the glorious hope of the Christians from the beginning until now. This promise of Jesus, and later of the angels, has been a driving and a sustaining force, right throughout the Church Age. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

This message was also resisted because it brought with it fear of judgement. Instead of repenting, the Jewish leaders thought that it would be better to silence the witnesses by persecution and extermination. They said, "To stop this thing from spreading any further, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in the name of the Lord", Acts 4:17. Later on Stephen, James, and many others who would not remain silent, were put to death by the Jews.

4. **Repentance, Water Baptism and Baptism in the Holy Spirit.**

On the Day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed, "Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit", Acts 2:38.

The Preaching of the Word: In the beginning we find several sermons preached by Peter and a single one by Stephen. However, we must not think that Peter was the only preacher. When the Holy Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, they all spoke in a foreign language, the people heard every man speak. In a spirit-filled church all are involved in the proclamation of the Gospel. "**W**e cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard", Acts 4:20.

Signs and Wonders: It was through a strong but simple teaching, a firm belief and a living

ministry, a complete surrender to Christ, together with God confirming His Word with signs and miracles, that these men were able to turn the world upside down. In a living and spirit-filled church, signs and wonders will follow the preaching of the Word today, just like it did 2000 years ago. "And these signs shall follow them that believe ...", Mark 16:15-18.

Love and Brotherhood: Although Peter usually assumed leadership he never exercised supreme power over his fellow brethren. He was a leader, not a dictator. He was a servant of God, not a lord over the flock. It was that which he was in the Lord that made him the prominent person he became.

There was great love amongst the first believers. The rich cared for the poor, which was good, but when they tried to have everything in common, this enthusiastic attempt failed, as the incident of Ananias and Sapphira shows so clearly. Acts 5:1-11.

D. The great failure of the early church: lack of mission zeal

The Lord had said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to all nations". Soon after the Day of Pentecost it seemed as if the church had lost the vision for a worldwide mission among "all the nations" and concentrated on their work on the home front. Besides that, the brethren became more and more involved with internal church affairs, rather than the spreading of the Gospel. There were financial matters to be solved because more and more money was given to the church. Later we find Peter, who earlier had been found preaching in the Temple daily, now sitting counting money instead. The social welfare work became a focus. This caused jealousy, and matters had to be resolved. Fortunately, the Apostles recognised the danger thereof, and seven deacons were elected to handle these practical affairs.

Let us watch out that money, church affairs and settling matters do not deprive us of our vision to win the world for the Lord. The Lord warned His church by saying, "Repent and do the first works, or else I will come unto you quickly and remove your lamp stand (the church) out of its place". The Lord kept His word, as we shall see later.

E. The expansion of the church

From the preaching of Stephen (AD 35, Acts 7) to the Council in Jerusalem (AD 48, Acts 15).

An Important Epoch: Church Planting.

This period of less than 15 years was of great importance to the church. Although the church was originally situated only in Jerusalem, she had now also become firmly planted in Syria and Asia Minor, reaching out to Europe. The first members were exclusively Jewish, but after a while the majority were Gentiles. At first the Word was only preached in Hebrew and Aramaic, but soon it was recognised that the whole world could be reached with the Gospel by means of the Greek language. We shall now see how this happened.

Persecution of the church by Jewish leaders.

Christ commanded His disciples to go "into all the world and preach the gospel", but they preferred to stay in Jerusalem. God intervened. He permitted persecution to take place.

1. **The Preaching of Stephen.** Acts 6:1-4 and chapter 7. Because of his faithfulness to the Word, Stephen was granted the honour of becoming the first martyr of the Christian Church. The young rabbi **Saul from Tarsus**, an eyewitness who watched the execution, was pleased. The same Saul later became the leader of a nation-wide persecution of Christians; to such an extent, that all Christians except the apostles fled from Jerusalem. Acts 8:1-4. "They were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the Word". In this way the Word rapidly spread to the surrounding areas.
2. **The Gospel goes to Samaria.** Acts chapter 8. The Samaritans were a mixed population of people from Babylon (who populated Samaria after the ten tribes had been deported to Assyria) and people of Israel who remained and escaped deportation. They did serve Jehovah, but also worshipped the old heathen idols. Therefore the Jews had nothing to do with them. John 4:9.

The Lord called Philip, one of the seven deacons, to go and preach the Word in Samaria. God blessed him and many signs and wonders were performed in the name of Jesus. A revival broke out in Samaria, people were saved and baptised, and when the Apostles heard about the revival they came down to the Samaritans, prayed for them and they were baptised in the Holy Spirit.

Note: The Samaritans were saved and baptised in water under the ministry of Philip, but they were not as yet baptised in the Holy Spirit. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a special anointing by which we receive power from God.

3. **The Gospel goes to Africa.** Acts chapter 8. Once again it was Philip who was obedient to the voice of the Lord. Leaving a flourishing revival in the hands of the Apostles (not afraid that they should steal his members) he went along the long and dusty road towards Gaza. Acts 8:26-40. Here the Lord led him to a traveller – the Minister of Finance of Ethiopia. Philip led him to the Lord and baptised him. History will tell that the Coptic Church (the native Christian Church of Egypt) as we know it today, originated from this brief meeting on that desert road to Gaza.
4. **A Persecutor changes Swords.** Acts chapter 9. "And Saul yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" had a dramatic life changing experience on the Damascus Road, where he had a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ whose followers he had been persecuting. In Acts 9:20 we read, "and immediately he preached Christ, that He is the Son of God". Saul laid down his sword of persecution and took up the sword of the Word of God, the sword that never rested until the day he could say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith", 2 Timothy 4:7.

After the experience on the Damascus Road, Paul went into the desert of Arabia for three years, where he received further revelations from God. Thereafter he returned to Jerusalem to meet the Apostles. After Saul had met the brethren in Jerusalem he returned to Tarsus. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria", Galatians 1:16-18, Acts 9:20-31.

5. **The Gospel goes to the Gentiles.** Acts chapter 10. It was Peter who was the main speaker on the day of Pentecost, the day when the Gospel was first preached to the Jewish people. It was also Peter who was the tool in the hand of God to open the way

for the Gospel to reach the Gentiles when he preached the Word in the house of Cornelius. This visit followed a vision given first to Cornelius, and then confirmed by a vision given to Peter, that what God cleanses is clean – even the Gentiles. God confirmed His Word by baptising the house of Cornelius with the Holy Spirit. Then they were baptised in water. Thus the first Gentile assembly was formed.

6. **The Gospel goes to Asia Minor.** Acts chapter 13. In this chapter of the book of Acts we find the calling of the first two missionaries to foreign lands: Barnabas and Saul. This calling and sending out took place in the church of Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians. Acts 11:26.

Barnabas was a true shepherd. When Paul came from Damascus and all the disciples were afraid of him, it was Barnabas who had the courage to meet Saul and to introduce him to the Brethren in Jerusalem. Acts 9:26-29.

Although the Apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch, which was in the midst of a revival, he took time off to go more than 150 km by sea in order to seek Saul of Tarsus. He found him and brought him to Antioch, not knowing that just over a year later the voice of the Lord should call through the prophetic channel, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them”, Acts 13:1-5.

In Antioch the Holy Spirit had said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul”, but had not mentioned John Mark. However, they took him along as well. John was an enthusiastic young man, but might have lacked the maturity to cope with the hardships they had to face. He soon left them and returned home. From this we can learn that one should not go into the ministry unless one is called, and that enthusiasm does not imply calling.

After being called by God, Barnabas and Paul were blessed by the church and went on their mission journey to Asia Minor, where they founded many churches, as recorded in Acts 13-14. They finally returned to Antioch, which increasingly became their Mission Centre.

Two great Apostles separate.

When Paul and Barnabas prepared to go on their next mission journey the failure of John Mark came between them. Their disagreement was so strong that they separated, never to travel together again. Here we see the shepherd's heart of Barnabas again: Although John Mark had failed once; he was ready to give him another chance. John Mark was now at least 15 years older and therefore more mature. He took him with him and started a work on Cyprus. In Paul we see a strong man for whom principles meant more than pleasing a person – a man who would rather break fellowship than give in to another person's opinion.

Years passed by and Paul became older. God's grinding stone had left its marks. The same Paul who in his younger years had said, "I do not think that I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5) later said "I am the worst of all sinners" (1 Timothy 1:16). Self-realisation had taken the place of self-righteousness, pride was replaced by humility, and love had taken the place of cold and stiff principles. In 2 Corinthians he lays much emphasis on loving and forgiving.

Later we see that Paul felt lonely. Just before his execution he wrote to Timothy, "Demas has deserted me, Crescens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia, only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry". 2 Timothy

4:10-11. It was the same Mark whom Paul had once discarded. From this we learn that we should not abandon a person because he has made a mistake, we might need him later.

F. Council meeting in Jerusalem (AD 48, Acts 15)

Problems: The inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church was not without problems. Jewish Christians held the following viewpoints:

1. **The Conservative Group** believed that there could be no salvation outside Israel. Therefore, although the Gentiles had accepted Christ as their Messiah, they believed that they ought to be circumcised and keep the Jewish laws.
2. **The Progressive Group** had the viewpoint that salvation is by faith in Christ, apart from the Jewish laws. Paul and Barnabas held this viewpoint and 1500 years later it became the conviction of Martin Luther, which urged him to initiate the Reformation.

A meeting was arranged in Jerusalem in order to deal with this crucial matter of doctrine concerning Gentiles accepting Christ as their Saviour. After a long dispute (Acts 15) the Apostles and elders came to the conclusion (which was confirmed by the Holy Spirit) that the Gentiles were not under the Jewish law, but that they should abstain from:

1. The pollution of idols.
2. Blood.
3. Eating the meat of strangled animals.
4. Fornication.

Letters to this effect were sent to the Gentile churches by the hands of Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas. When they came to Antioch they gathered the church and delivered the content of the letter. The people were glad to receive the encouraging message. Acts 15:30-31.

G. The church among the Gentiles

From the Council in Jerusalem (AD 48) to the martyrdom of the Apostle Paul (AD 68).

For this period of time we are solely dependent on the book of Acts, the epistles of Paul and the beginning of the 1st epistle of Peter. The mission field of the Apostle Paul and his co-workers was the whole Roman Empire, while some of the other Apostles and messengers (according to traditions) even went to farther countries.

Gentile membership was increasing tremendously, whereas the Jewish membership continually decreased. The Jews became more and more bitter in their hatred towards the Christian church and were always ready to instigate persecution against them. Is this what Paul meant when he wrote, "Salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke them (the Jews) to jealousy?" Romans 11:11.

Paul's Second Journey (Acts 15:36 – 16:22): Because of the disagreement between Barnabas and Paul, **Barnabas** took his nephew **John Mark** with him to their home country Cyprus, while **Paul** took **Silas**, a prophet, with him on his second missionary journey. They re-visited some churches in Asia Minor and intended to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of the Lord forbade them. They then went to Troas, a city on the west coast of Asia Minor.

The Gospel goes to Europe – The Macedonian Call: One night while Paul and Silas were in Troas, a Macedonian man appeared to Paul in a vision saying, “Come over to Macedonia (Greece) and help us”, Acts 16:9. Immediately Paul and Silas went to Macedonia on the European continent and established churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth. We notice that in the beginning wherever he went Paul always sought acquaintance with the Jews first.

Jews from the whole known world had been present on the Day of Pentecost and they had witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the water baptism of 3000 believers. Many had come from distant countries to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem and had returned to their home countries. It is possible that it was some of them that Paul met with because some of the Jews seemed friendlier than others. When the majority of the Jews refused the message of Christ as the resurrected Son of God, Paul turned to the Gentiles.

In Philippi: The first convert in Europe was a woman called Lydia, who was selling scarlet cloth from Thyatira. This was a genuine conversion: She and her household were baptised and she opened her home to the Lord's servants.

The Devil speaks the truth. He is never more dangerous than when he does just that. A girl with an evil spirit followed Paul and Silas and confirmed that they were true servants of God and that they showed the people the way to Salvation. How easily she could have been accepted as a true convert. The message was right but the spirit was wrong. This shows us how important it is that the servants of God have the gift of discerning spirits. The spirit was cast out and this resulted in a great loss of business for her masters who earned money off her occult ability. Consequently Paul and Silas were arrested and put in jail. God, who is the Master of each situation, sent an earthquake as they worshipped. The jail was damaged, the doors opened and all the prisoners had the opportunity to escape, but they didn't. The jailer repented and invited Paul and Silas to his home where they had a glorious meeting and the jailer and his household were saved and baptised. Acts 16. It must have been a strange experience for the jailer to have an empty prison but a full house. **Praise sets captives free!**

In Thessalonica they also first went to the Jews, and both Jews and Greeks believed, but the Jews who didn't believe stirred up a riot. They knew exactly what to say. If the apostles had only been accused of forming "another religion", no attention would have been paid to the accusation (Greece already had an innumerable amount of religions), but when they said, "These people say that there is another king", the authorities woke up. How ridiculous of the Jews to make such an accusation while they themselves were rebelling against the Roman oppression. It seems as if they tried to use this situation to obtain favour from the Roman authorities.

In Berea the Word was accepted among the Jews as well as among the Gentiles. When the Thessalonians heard this, they came and caused trouble in Berea as well, and Paul and Silas had to leave the city, but the Word of God had been planted. They truly lived according to the Words of Jesus, "when they persecute you in one town, flee to another", Matthew 10:23.

In Athens: Once more they first went to the Jews, but they did not accept the message. Later Paul realised that "God had blinded Israel for a time, because they had crucified Christ. The elect of Israel received, but the others were hardened", Romans 11:7. And "the fall of them became the riches of the world", Romans 11:12.

Lesson: Do not despair because of closed doors, but go through the open ones. “For I have set before you an open door, which no man can close, says the Lord”, Revelation 3:8.

The well-educated Greek philosophers challenged Paul to a discussion but this was not so much because they wanted to hear the Word. They did not repent – they were only interested in debates. When they did not know what to reply, they mocked. Jesus prayed, "I thank you Father that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children", Luke 10:21.

In Corinth: As was Paul’s custom he first went to the Jews. He stayed with a Jewish tentmaker named Aquila. Perhaps he worked for him in order to earn money since he himself was a tentmaker by trade. Paul said, "Yes ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me", Acts 20:34. Although Paul was a highly educated Rabbi and an Apostle of God, he was not too proud to do simple work for the sake of spreading the gospel.

A crucial decision: Again the Jews opposed the Gospel. This caused a turning point in Paul's life and ministry. He said, "Your blood be upon your own heads, from now on I will go to the Gentiles", Acts 18:6. It was a crucial decision for Paul to make, but it was according to the Will of God.

Paul and Silas stayed in Corinth for 18 months and taught the believers. From Corinth Paul wrote two letters to the Thessalonians. After another attack by the Jews, he left Corinth and went back to Antioch via Ephesus and Caesarea.

Paul's Third Mission Journey (Acts 18:23 – 21:17): Paul's only companion in the beginning was Timothy, who joined him in Lystra on his second journey. Acts 16:1-3. Quite a number of fellow travellers were with him before he completed this journey. One of the most important was Luke.

Luke was a Greek doctor from Troas (the beloved physician, Colossians 4:14). He wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, which is a continuation of his gospel. (Compare Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1-2.) Luke does not mention his own name in the book of Acts, but we trace his presence through the use of the words “**we**” in certain passages, e.g. Acts 16:10-11, and “**us**” in verse 14, etc. Where **we** or **us** is used it is concluded that Luke was with Paul, otherwise he used the words **he**, **they** and **them**. Acts 18:22; 21:17.

Paul – an Apostle in chains (Acts 22:23 – 28:31): Paul spent several years in prison, but he never stopped being a missionary. Circumstances did not change his zeal. After a long eventful voyage Paul landed in Rome, the city he had so longed to see. Here he had liberty to live in his own hired house, but was chained to a soldier. Even though he was a prisoner he had a great impact on the Christian Church in Rome, as well as testifying to the Jews. The greatest work we know about Paul in Rome was the writing of the letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians and to Philemon.

It is believed that after the two years of imprisonment (Acts 28:30-31) Paul was set at liberty, but we have no record of this time, only a few hints in his epistles. Tradition says that he was arrested in Necropolis in Northern Greece under the Roman Emperor Nero and brought back to Rome. During this second imprisonment he wrote First Timothy, Titus and Second Timothy; which was his last letter. In this letter he expresses his knowledge of his

approaching death: *"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day"*, 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

In AD 68 Paul was beheaded by the Emperor Nero.

H. Literature

At the time of the Council in Jerusalem in AD 48 none of the New Testament books had been written but, before the close of the year 68, a large part of the New Testament was in circulation, including the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the epistles of Paul, James and 1 Peter.

During the years 68 – 100 other books were written: The epistle to the Hebrews and also perhaps 2 Peter; the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John as well as Jude and the book of Revelation. The universal recognition of these books as divinely inspired came later. It is uncertain whether 2 Peter is written by Peter, or whether the epistle to the Hebrews is written by Paul.

I. The Age of Shadows

From the martyrdom of the Apostle Paul (AD 68) to the death of the Apostle John (AD 100).

This time is called the "Age of Shadows" because the gloom of persecution was hanging over the church, and also because very little is known about this period. The book of Acts does not guide us any longer, and no author has filled the gap. Fifty years of silence hangs over the church after the death of Paul. How wonderful it would be to have as full a record from all the other Apostles as we have from Paul. Even John, whom we know lived until AD 100, does not give us much information. He wrote his epistles and the book of Revelation, but about the Church itself he is silent. Tradition says that all the Apostles, except Judas who hanged himself and John who died a natural death in Ephesus at the age of 100, were martyred.

From about the year 120 we have the first writings of the early Church Fathers, but we find that the church differs in many ways from the church of the days of Peter and Paul.

J. The fall of Jerusalem

AD 70 brought about a great change in the relationship between the Christians and the Jews. Up to this time only the Jews in Israel had opposed Caesar. In the rest of the Empire they submitted to him and lived in peace. (Similarly the Jews in Israel today have to fight their own battle, while their brethren in the rest of the world can live comfortably and in safety.) The Jews put their own interpretation upon the prophetic writings and believed that they were to govern the whole world (which is what they are to do during the Millennium). This is why they submitted unwillingly to Caesar.

In AD 66 the Jewish rebellion broke out, and in AD 70 the **Roman Emperor Vespasian** decided to bring the Jewish nation to an end. He sent his own son **Titus** with a great army against Jerusalem. His correspondent, **Josephus Flavius**, who was a former leader of Jewish

rebels, accompanied him. However, he lost 40,000 men, was captured and taken to Rome for execution, where he impressed the Emperor so much that Vespasian released him and adopted him as his own son. Josephus was a great historian and the only reliable historian who lived at the same time as Christ and the Apostles. He wrote a historical commentary to the Old Testament and described the Jewish wars in his book, which is still available.

With the help of Josephus, Titus, who did not want to destroy the Jewish nation, tried in vain to persuade the Jewish people to put down their weapons. Jerusalem was besieged and the temple burned with the people inside who had sought refuge there. In their search for melted gold, the Roman soldiers ploughed the site where the temple had stood. By doing so, they fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus from forty years before: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be trodden down", Matthew 24:1-2.

Although more than a million Jewish people perished in the battle only a few Christians lost their lives. Why? Because Jesus had warned them by saying "and when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation is near, then flee, depart!" Luke 21:20-24. How important it is to take heed to the warnings of God.

The Ebionites: A small group of Jewish Christians called the Ebionites survived for about 200 years. The Jews did not accept them because they believed in Christ, and the Christians did not accept them because they adhered to the Mosaic laws and customs. They faded away.

The Essenes: The Essenes were a Jewish group that had gathered in the desert near the Dead Sea. They adhered closely to the Jewish Scriptures and made an effort to copy them exactly and to preserve them for coming generations. They practised baptism by immersion. Some believe that John the Baptist was an Essene before he came forth to proclaim Christ.

In 1947 a Bedouin shepherd found a cave seven miles from Jericho and one mile from the Dead Sea containing many leather scrolls covered with Hebrew and Aramaic letters. They turned out to be copies of Old Testament writings. It is generally believed that those scrolls are the handiwork of those old faithful servants. Unfortunately, there has been no further trace of the Essenes after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

K. Conclusion

By the beginning of the second century, the church was found in almost every region and city from the Tiber to the Euphrates and from the Black Sea to Northern Africa. Temples of idols were forsaken. Christians were everywhere. There was equality in the church. A slave might be an elder while his master was a member. At the end of that century the Gentile believers accepted the writings of Paul, Peter and John, whilst the Jewish believers still adhered to some of their laws. Baptism and Holy Communion were practised in the early church. The moral standard was high but the spiritual level was lower than in the early Apostolic days. No wonder that God warned them by saying, "I have something against you, you have left your first love. Repent and do the first work, or I will come and remove your lamp stand (the church)", Revelation 2:4-5.

The Apostolic Age closed with the death of the Apostle John in about AD 100.

THE APOSTLES: THEIR OCCUPATIONS, MINISTRIES AND DEATHS

| <u>Apostle</u> | <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Area of ministry</u> | <u>Death</u> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Peter | Fisherman | First leader of the Christian Church | Crucified upside down in Rome* |
| James | Fisherman | Judea | Beheaded AD 44 by Herode Antipas |
| John | Fisherman | Jerusalem/Ephesus/Patmos | Died a natural death in Ephesus |
| Andrew | Fisherman | Scythia/ Greece/Asia Minor | Martyred on a St.Andrew cross |
| Philip | Unknown | Phrygia | Martyred in Hierapolis, Turkey |
| Bartholomew | Unknown | Turkey/Iran | Martyred * |
| Thomas | Unknown | Partia/Media | Martyred in India |
| Matthew | Tax collector | Ethiopia | Martyred * |
| James the Less | Unknown | Palestine/Egypt | Crucified in Egypt * |
| Jude | Unknown | Assyria/Iran | Martyred * |
| Simon the Zealot | Unknown | Unknown | Crucified * |
| Judas Iscariot | Unknown | Betrayed Jesus | Hanged himself |

* The exact way of death is not known but is based largely upon tradition and historical writings. If these traditions are correct, only one Apostle, John, died a natural death, one committed suicide, and 10 suffered martyrdom, four of them by crucifixion.

The Smyrna Period – The Persecuted Church

Lesson 3

THE SMYRNA PERIOD (Revelation 2:8-11)

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| TIME: | From the burning of Rome (AD 64) to the edict of Constantine (AD 313). |
| CHRIST: | The First and the Last. The Alpha and Omega. "He died and came to life again". |
| EXHORTATION: | "Hear what the Spirit says to the churches". |
| PRAISE: | Endurance in Tribulation. Faithful unto death. |
| PROMISE: | The Crown of Life. |
| REBUKE: | "Some of you are of Satan's synagogue". |
| CHALLENGE: | "Fear not! Be faithful! You will have suffering for ten days". |
| WARNING: | No warning to the suffering church. |

A. Introduction

Smyrna was about 65 km north of Ephesus and was considered the safest seaport at that time. It was on the main route from Rome to India and Persia (Iran). On one end of the main street stood the temple of **Zeus** (their supreme god) and on the other end the temple of **Cybele** (the mother of gods). Smyrna was also a centre of Emperor worship, having a temple for the Roman Emperor **Tiberius Caesar**. This foreshadows that the last Roman Emperor, the antichrist, shall also demand Emperor worship. "So that he, antichrist, sits in the temple of God showing himself that he is God", 2 Thessalonians 2:4. This last emperor will also have a statue made of himself and will kill those who will not worship it. Revelation 13:14-15.

B. History of the Smyrna period

It is believed that the ten days of tribulation that were to come over Smyrna refer to ten specific periods of persecution under ten diabolic Caesars. The names of some of the martyrs who were killed or who suffered under their reigns appear next to the names of the respective emperors.

Emperors:

1. Nero (64-68)
2. Domitian (90-95)
3. Trajan (104-117)
4. Aurelius (161-180)
5. Severus (200-211)

6. Maximus (235-237)
7. Decius (250-253)
8. Valerian (257-260)
9. Aurelian (270-275)
10. Diocletian & successors (303-312)

Martyrs:

- Peter crucified AD 67; Paul beheaded AD 68.
John exiled to Patmos.
Simeon brother of Jesus AD 107; Bishop Ignatius AD 110.
Justin Martyr AD 165 & multitudes of Christians.
Leonides the father of Origen; Perpetua and Filicita; Ireneus AD 202.
Persecution. No names mentioned.
Origen AD 254 and many others.
Planned persecution did not occur.
Bishop Cyprian of Carthago; Bishop Sextus of Rome.
General imperial persecutions.

C. The imperial persecutions

The prominent feature in the history of the church throughout the second and third century is the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperors. These persecutions were not continuous, but depended on the attitude of the ruling Emperor towards the Christians. These repeated persecutions lasted for about 200 years until the Emperor Constantine issued his "Edict of Tolerance" in AD 313. No wonder the Lord comforted the Smyrna church with the words "I am the First and the Last; I died, but came to life again". In other words: In all your troubles remember, I am still on the throne, and because I live, you shall live also.

D. The causes of persecutions

1. **One God.** Heathenism was tolerant of new forms of religion. Where there were already hundreds of gods, another one would not make any difference – but Christianity declared that there is only one God – theirs, and they would not compromise with the heathens' gods and their idols. An Emperor willingly made an offer to the Christians to put up a statue of Christ in Pantheon (a building in Rome erected by King Agrippa for the purpose of worship of all gods). The Christians refused his offer.
2. **Emperor Worship.** A statue of the reigning Emperor stood in a prominent place in every city. In front of his image incense was offered as unto a god. Because the Christians refused to worship this image, and because they sang hymns to another king, they were looked upon by the multitude as disloyal to Caesar and plotters of revolution.
3. **Idol worship.** Idols were a part of everyday life. Images stood in every house and were worshipped. At every festival drink-offerings were given to them. The Christians would not, of course, take part in such activities and were condemned as antisocial and haters of their fellow man.
4. **Judaism was recognised.** Judaism was a recognised religion in the Roman Empire. For a long time the Christians had been protected because they were considered to be a smaller Jewish sect but, after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Christians stood alone and the Jews were always ready to get the church into trouble with the government.
5. **Secret meetings.** Because of persecutions the Christians had to meet in secret places – often during the night. This caused suspicion because all secret cults and gatherings were forbidden for fear of disloyal aims.
6. **Equality in the Church.** The Christians looked upon all men as equal. They made no distinction between race and social class. For this reason they were called "levellers" and "subverters of social order" and were therefore enemies of the State.
7. **Loss of business** often promoted a spirit of persecution towards the Christians. For example, when Paul preached at Ephesus, the profits of the silversmith Demetrius were at stake so he started an uprising. Craftsmen and merchants earned fortunes by making and dealing in materials for the purpose of idol worship and could lose their most profitable business if the people accepted Christ and had no further need of their statues. It was easy to say, "to the lions with the Christians", and this voice was eagerly

heard by the state officials, who had the right to take over the property of those who had been executed.

E. Stages of persecution

There is an overlap between the Ephesian and the Smyrna periods. The Ephesian period ended with the death of John in AD 100, whereas the Smyrna period began with the first imperial persecution when Nero set Rome alight in AD 64.

The persecutions by Nero and Domitian were merely local spasmodic outbreaks of violence against the Christians, whilst later on the church was subject to systematic imperial persecutions in order to crush the ever-growing faith. It is noteworthy to see that emperors, such as Vespasian who caused the onslaught against Jerusalem, and his son Titus who captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, and Hadrian who brought the state of Israel to an end in AD 132, did not persecute the church.

F. The ten imperial persecutions

THE FIRST PERSECUTION – NERO 54 – 68.

Claudius Nero was 16 years old when he ascended the throne in AD 54. He was the great grandson of Augustus who issued the command that all should be registered. Luke 2.

Nero triggered off the first of **the ten Imperial Persecutions** by the **burning of Rome in AD 64**, when two thirds of Rome was burned. It is interesting to see that the final **burning of Rome** will be instigated by the last Roman imperial ruler, the antichrist, "The beast and the ten horns ... will ... burn her with fire", Revelation 17:15-16.

It was said that Nero was a tender-hearted youth and that when he had to sign the first death sentence he exclaimed, "**I wish that I had never learned to write**". His young heart was soon changed. Only one year later he allowed his step brother to be killed. In AD 59 he murdered his own mother, his first wife Octavia, his second wife Poppea and later his old friend and teacher Seneca. By the year 61 Rome was in turmoil. In AD 64 Rome was set ablaze. Nero was charged with the crime but, in order to clear himself, Nero declared that the Christians had set fire to the city and a terrible persecution began.

Up to this time the Jews had always instigated persecution, while the Christians had been protected by the Roman government and considered a Jewish sect. Now it had become an imperial affair. Thousands of Christians were tortured and put to death, among them the **Apostle Peter** by crucifixion in AD 67. Tradition says that he was crucified with his head downwards at his own request, because he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Master. **The Apostle Paul** was beheaded in AD 68.

Thousands of Christians were murdered, some were thrown to wild animals to be torn to pieces and others were burned as living torches in the Emperor's garden while the Emperor drove his chariot amongst them. **The Emperor's Garden** where this scene took place is today the site of the **Vatican**, the home of the Pope and **St. Peter's Church**.

THE SECOND PERSECUTION – DOMITIAN 90 – 96.

Domitian: After Nero committed suicide in AD 68, the church had peace until another

diabolical emperor arose. His name was Domitian. Thousands of Christians were slain; **John the Apostle** was exiled to Patmos in the Aegean Sea. It was here that he received the Book of Revelation.

THE THIRD PERSECUTION – TRAJAN 104 – 117.

Trajan is said to have been the most important Emperor to occupy the throne of Rome. He was a good ruler for his country, but he vigorously persecuted the Christian church. One of his tribunes, **Pliny the Younger**, Governor of Bithynia, investigated the Christian life and doctrines and found that there was nothing that was in conflict with the Roman law. He brought his findings to the attention of the Roman Emperor, but Trajan replied, "If these people who are brought before you are found guilty of being Christians, let them be beheaded, but if they deny their Christian faith and it can be proven that they worship our gods, let them be released".

Simeon, who like James was a brother of Jesus, was crucified in AD 107 at the age of 110 by order of the Roman governor in Palestine during the reign of Trajan.

Bishop Ignatius of Antioch. He, like Paul and John, wrote letters to various churches. Some of them are found in the book "The Apostolic Fathers". He was more than willing to die for his Master. He wrote letters of encouragement to the churches on his way to Rome where he was thrown before the wild beasts in AD 110.

Polycarp (69 – 155) was a disciple of the Apostle John, a friend of Ignatius and a teacher of Ireneus. He was ordained by the Apostle John as Bishop of the Seven Churches in Asia. It was probably to him that John sent the book of Revelation (the messages to the Seven Churches in Asia) while he was in exile on Patmos. When he was asked to deny his Lord in order to escape burning at the stake, he said, "**Eighty six years I have served my Lord and He has never done me anything other than good. How can I now speak evil of my King who saved me?**" He was burned at the stake, dying a heroic death for his faith, under the reign of the **Emperor Anthonius Pius** in AD 155.

THE FOURTH PERSECUTION – MARCUS AURELIUS 161 – 180.

Marcus Aurelius was known as a good Emperor for the State, as well as an ethical writer. Although he was a good man and a just ruler of his nation, he was a bitter persecutor of the Christians. He sought to restore the old Roman life with the ancient religions, but the Christians' faith in the One God was always in the way. Multitudes of the believers were beheaded or cast to the wild beasts.

Justin Martyr (100 – 165) was born in Samaria of heathen parents. He was well educated as a philosopher and continued teaching after he became a Christian. One day while this young philosopher was walking along the seashore he met a friendly looking old man who proved to be a Christian. He pointed to the old Hebrew Prophets, "men who are more ancient than the highest esteemed philosophers". Justin said later, "I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable". Who the old man was has never become known, but he led a young, proud, godless scientist to the Lord, a man who for almost forty years travelled among the churches strengthening them in their faith.

He wrote two famous writings: "Apologies (defences) of the Christian religion" and

"Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon". In the latter he wrote as follows: "They execute us, they nail us to the cross, they throw us before wild animals and into the fire, but the more evil they do to us, the larger the number of believers becomes. This is exactly like the vine tree, where new and fresh branches grow forth where others have been cut off. So it is for a Christian who is a vine tree planted by God". In AD 165 he was caught by Marcus Aurelius and beheaded.

THE FIFTH PERSECUTION – SEPTIMUS SEVERUS 202 – 211.

After the death of Aurelius the church had peace until the next persecutor, **Septimus Severus** ascended the imperial throne. He also raged against the church, mostly in Egypt and North Africa. In Alexandria **Leonides** the father of the great theologian **Origen** was beheaded. In Carthago the noble lady **Perpetua** and her slave **Felicitas** were thrown to the wild beasts.

Caracala, Emperor (211 – 217) conferred citizenship upon every person throughout his empire. This was a great release for the Christians, for only slaves could from then on be thrown to the wild beasts or be crucified.

THE SIXTH PERSECUTION – THRAKER MAXIMUS 235 – 237.

After a time of peace **Thraker Maximus** ascended the throne. He was militant and barbaric and wished to express his sympathy for the pagan religions by persecuting the Christians. His rule was short. Because of his harsh way of ruling a plot was formed that killed him.

THE SEVENTH PERSECUTION – DECIUS 250 – 253.

During his reign fierce persecution broke out again. Fortunately his reign was short and forty years of peace followed for the church.

THE EIGHT PERSECUTION – VALERIAN 257 – 260.

During his reign the famous **Bishop Cyprian of Carthago** was put to death, as well as the **Roman Bishop, Sextus**.

THE NINTH PERSECUTION – AURELIAN 270 – 275.

The Emperor Aurelian was a dedicated sun-worshipper. Although he did not directly persecute the church at first, he would not let them have independence. Finally he commanded that the Christians should be persecuted. Fortunately this was never carried out because of his sudden death.

THE TENTH PERSECUTION – DIOCLETIAN 303 – 310.

Diocletian, Emperor and his successors (303 – 313). With the labour force of enslaved Christians, the immense baths of Diocletian were erected in Rome. Many years later a part of this building was transformed by **Michelangelo** (the Italian sculptor and designer of St. Peter's Cathedral) into the Church of Santa Maria and consecrated in 1561.

Diocletian ordered that every copy of the Bible should be burned, churches should be broken

down and Christians who would not renounce their faith would lose their citizenship. Many places where Christians had sought refuge were set on fire and burned with the people inside. It is said that Diocletian erected a statue on which it was written, **“In honour of the extirpation (destroying) of the Christian superstition”**. At the age of 80 Diocletian abdicated from the imperial throne, but his successors Galarius and Constantinus continued the persecution until Constantine, the son of Constantinus, issued his **Tolerance Edict in AD 313**. This put an end to ten periods of horrible persecution over a time span of two hundred years. **The ten days Trial** mentioned in Revelation 2:10 had come to an end.

A stiff knee bends. Some years after his abdication Diocletian felt that death was near, he regretted his sins and summoned the bishops of the city. On the Day of Pentecost 337 he was baptised. He who believed that he had eliminated Christianity came to the Cross himself.

G. Church government during this period

Whilst some of the Apostles of Christ were still alive the churches looked to them as the responsible leaders. When Luke wrote the book of Acts and Paul wrote his letters, titles such as "bishop" and "elders" were applied to the same officials. In about 125 we find that these "bishops" had taken control over their areas. At the council meeting in Jerusalem in AD 48 (Acts 15) both apostles and elders took part, while in AD 150 councils were held by bishops only. This shows that the church departed more and more from the original teaching and practice of the apostles. The apostolic offices dwindled away and were taken over by bishops, who then became the rulers of the churches. This is why some believe that the time of apostles ceased with the death of John, but this is not so. The ministries of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers as set forth in Ephesians 4:11 developed during the time of the Apostles and, although they had been suppressed and for a time seemed to be almost extinct, they have always been around, and they are still active in the church today.

H. Schools of Theology

The School at Alexandria was founded in AD 180 by **Pantaenus**, who was a Greek philosopher before he became a Christian. Later he went to India, Persia (Iran) and South Arabia to minister. He died in AD 200.

Clement of Alexandria was a student of Pantaenus and succeeded him as head of the school until he was driven from his post during the persecution of Septimus Severus in AD 202. Some of his books still exist.

Origen (185 – 254) was a great theologian. His father Leonides was murdered for his faith under Severus in AD 202 when Origen was only 17 years old. He supported his family by teaching Greek philosophy and literature. He re-opened the Bible School that had been closed down by Clement's departure. He became the author of many lengthy theological and dogmatic works. Later he moved to Caesarea where he opened another Bible School of which he was a leader for more than twenty years. He was imprisoned under the Decian persecution and died from maltreatment in prison at the age of sixty-nine in AD 254.

The School of Asia Minor was not located in any city; it was more like a **"Mobile Bible School"** or **"Extensional Training"**. It consisted of a group of theology teachers and writers. The greatest of these was **Ireneus** (130 – 202), born in Smyrna where he received

his early Christian training under Polycarp. The churches in Asia Minor sent him as a missionary to France where he converted almost the whole population of Lyon and sent missionaries to many heathen countries. He was martyred during the persecution of Severus in AD 202.

The School at Carthage in North Africa did more than any of the other schools to shape the theological beliefs in Europe. The two greatest men were **Tertullian** and **Cyprian**.

Tertullian (160 – 200) was a strong defender of the Christian faith against Judaism, heresy and heathenism. He esteemed marriage highly. He joined the montanists and used both preaching and pen to reprove what he thought was worldliness and compromise in the church.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (195 – 258), son of a high-ranking Roman Officer, became a Christian in his middle age. Three distinct factors influenced his conversion: the reading of Tertullian's writings, the teachings of Cellius from Rome and the study of the Scriptures.

One year after his conversion he became an elder in Carthage (247), then Bishop and Head of the North African Church in 248. He fulfilled his office with skill, energy, wisdom and hard work. He sought refuge because of persecution and from his place of hiding encouraged his fellow-Christians to remain faithful to the Name of the Lord. When the persecution was over he resumed his office. He made the Bishop in Rome the centre of the church. In 257 the **Emperor Valentin** banned **Cyprian**. He was martyred in AD 258.

The Christians of the second century battled, not only against persecution, but also against heresies and corrupt doctrines. Paul had foreseen this when he wrote, "**For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them**". Acts 20:29-30.

1. **The Gnostics** (Greek "gnosis" = knowledge). They believed that out of the supreme God emerged a large number of inferior gods, some good and some bad. Through these gods the world with its mingled good and evil was created. They believed that one of these gods lived in Christ and was the source of His divine nature. The Gnostic movement is said to have been short-lived in the second century, but it is fully alive today in various cults and in the New World Order philosophy.
2. **The Ebionites** (Hebrew – "poor") were Jewish Christians who insisted that the Jewish laws and customs should be observed. They rejected the writings of Paul, because his writings recognised Gentiles as Christians. They were despised by the Jews as apostates and found no fellowship with the gentile Christians. They faded away in the second century.
3. **The Manicheans** were of Persian origin and named after their founder **Mani**, who was put to death in AD 276 by the Persian Government. His teachings were that the universe is made up of two kingdoms, one of light and one of darkness, striving for mastery in the nature of man. They rejected Jesus, but believed in a "Celestial Christ". Both heathen and Christian Emperors persecuted them. Augustine, the great theologian, was a Manichean before his conversion.

4. **The Montanists** were named after their founder **Montanus**. They belonged to those who held fast to the true gospel. They were Puritans claiming the simplicity of the primitive Christians. They believed in the Priesthood of the believers and not in orders of ministry, as did Peter, 1 Peter 2:5, 9. "Ye are a Royal Priesthood". They exerted strict church discipline and practised prophecy. They had many prophets and prophetesses amongst them.

Those and many other movements, both good and bad, existed; but limited space does not allow us to go deeper into this matter.

I. The condition of the Church at the close of the second century

1. **A Purified Church**. The persecutions had kept away those who were not sincere, the half-hearted ones and those who might have joined for personal gain.
2. **Unified Teaching**. In spite of the influences of many different cultures, races and various sects, there was a unity of faith throughout the Christian church holding on to the doctrines laid down by Paul, Peter and others. "And they continued steadfastly in the doctrines of the Apostles", etc. Acts 2:42.
3. **An organised Church**. The pattern set by Paul for ordaining leaders in every town seems to have been effective and was followed. These leading men met in Councils in order to discuss matters of general importance for the whole church. This gave a strong international fellowship that has lasted throughout the centuries until the present day.
4. **A growing Church**. In spite of persecutions, or maybe because of them, the church grew rapidly. For two hundred years catacombs and underground quarries were homes, hiding places and meeting places. Graves with inscriptions numbered millions. How vast must the persecution have been! Still, at the close of the second century the Christians numbered several million in the Roman Empire. Truly, "the Gates of Hell did not prevail", Matthew 16:18.

J. The formation of the New Testament

It cannot exactly be stated when this took place. Some of the books, such as the epistles of Paul, were generally accepted everywhere, while books such as Hebrews, James and Revelation were only accepted in the East but rejected in the West. The East furthermore accepted books that are no longer in the Bible such as the epistle of Barnabas, the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles and the Revelation by the Apostle Peter. Councils were held from time to time to consider which books were inspired and which were not. The recognition of the New Testament did not happen before approximately AD 300.

The Pergamos Period – The Imperial Church

Lesson 4

THE PERGAMOS PERIOD (Revelation 2:12-17)

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| TIME: | From the Edict of Constantine (AD 313) to the Fall of Rome (AD 476). |
| CHRIST: | The Divider of Truth (A Sharp Sword). |
| EXHORTATION: | “Hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. |
| PRAISE: | “You have held fast and not denied My name”. |
| PROMISE: | “You shall eat of the hidden manna”. |
| REBUKE: | False doctrines and worldliness. “You dwell where the throne of Satan is”. |
| CHALLENGE: | “Repent”. |
| WARNING: | “I will fight against them with the Sword of My Mouth”. |

A. Introduction

The city of Pergamos was a blend of political, pagan and academic life at the university. It was the capital of Asia Minor and had many beautiful Royal Palaces. The inhabitants all practised the pagan rites of worship and built temples for **Zeus** as well as for the **Emperor Octavius**. Each citizen had to offer incense to the Emperor and declare that he was lord.

B. The victory of Christianity

After two hundred years of persecution, the church had not only survived but had conquered the Roman Emperor. Soon after the abdication of Diocletian in AD 305, four aspirants after the imperial throne were at war.

The two most powerful were **Marxentius** and **Constantine**. In AD 312, while they were in battle at Milvan Bridge ten miles from Rome, Constantine saw a shining cross in the sky bearing this motto: “**By this sign you shall conquer**”. He adopted the sign of the cross for his army and won the battle while Marxentius drowned in the river. The following year he gave his famous **Edict of Toleration**, which put an end to the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. This edict brought with it both good and bad results for the Christian church.

GOOD RESULTS: The persecution ended and the church buildings which had been built in peaceful times, but had been broken down by Diocletian, were rebuilt by means of public support. Christians could now build church buildings everywhere. **Constantine** set an example by building church buildings in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and in his new capital Constantinople.

Heathen sacrifices ceased. Where pagan worship had been supported by the State the support was often transferred to the churches. Constantine still "tolerated" idol worship because he wished to win the world gradually by evangelisation and not by force. Ministers of the church were supported by the government and could not be accused by common law. **Sunday** was introduced as the day for worship, slaves were set free, crucifixion of criminals

as well as the custom of putting unwanted babies out to die was forbidden. These and many other good results came from the "Tolerance Edict".

BAD RESULTS: It became a privilege to be a Christian and many joined the church for personal gain. Ambitious men joined the church in order to gain social and political influence. Because the church consisted of both saved and unsaved people, the moral tone in the church decreased. The services and churches increased in splendour while their love was growing cold. Heathen rites and ceremonies gradually crept into the church and by just changing their names and purposes some heathen feasts were changed into church feasts.

The Church must be on guard against worldliness entering under a spiritual guise. For example: The adoration of the Virgin Mary was substituted for worship of the goddesses Venus (the Roman goddess of beauty) and Diana (The Roman moon goddess).

That the church became engaged in politics did not transform the world but later the world dominated the church. Humility was replaced by pride, saintliness by ambition and arrogance among churchmen. No wonder the Lord said, "Repent". From this unnatural union of church and state arose two evils:

1. **In the Eastern Province / Constantinople:** the state dominated the church until it lost all its energy and spiritual life.
2. **In the Western Province / Rome:** the church gradually gained power over the state. This reminds us of Revelation chapter 17:1-6 where the Great Harlot, the Scarlet Woman (which seems to be the final One World Religious System), sits upon the political power, which apparently will be the Beast, the Antichrist. Revelation 17.

The founding of Constantinople AD 330: Constantine knew that Rome was closely associated with heathen worship and was filled with temples and heathen statues. Besides this she was built upon seven hills (Revelation 17:9), on an open plain and exposed to the attack of enemies and had often been conquered by invading forces.

Constantinople on the other hand had not been exposed to these old pagan beliefs and was therefore more suitable for promoting Christianity. This city had natural defences – she had been standing for twenty-five centuries and had rarely been taken. Here Constantine placed his new capital (the name today is Istanbul). In this new city there was no temple for idols, and Constantine forbade Emperor worship. He built the magnificent Sophia Church (it means "sacred wisdom").

The division of the Roman Empire: Although Constantine was safe behind the walls of Constantinople, the condition of Rome weakened after the removal of the Imperial Throne. The boundaries were so wide and the invasion of foreign rebels was so immense that the Emperor could no longer protect his dominion. Constantine had appointed associate Emperors in his time, but after his death the **Emperor Theodosius I** separated the east from the west. Prophetically this corresponds to the image of the world powers in the book of Daniel, where the Roman Empire would be divided (the division into two legs) until it would later come together under a 10 kingdoms federation (shown by the 10 toes) just before Christ returns and sets up His eternal Kingdom. Daniel 2:31-45).

The Western Empire was known as the **Latin Empire**, and the Eastern as the **Greek**

Empire. As nations they are still divided nationally as Italy and Greece and in the religious aspect as the **Roman Catholic Church** headed by the **Pope** and the **Greek Orthodox Church** headed by the **Patriarch**.

The successors of Constantine: Constantine had been very tolerant. It was his aim that changes concerning Christianity should be brought about gradually and of man's free will, but his successors, bearing the name of Christians, were very radical. Not long after the death of Constantine idol worshippers suffered the penalty of death and their property was confiscated. The Christian emperors in the name of Christianity were now using the same cruel methods which before had been used against the Christians.

C. Various forms of persecutions

During the **Ephesian** period the Christians were persecuted by the **Jews**.

During the **Smyrna** period they were persecuted by the **Roman Emperors**.

During the **Pergamos** period (a period of peace) troubles arose among **themselves**, as we shall see in the following **controversies**.

As the long conflict between Christianity and heathenism resulted in giving the Christians the upper hand, new strife arose: a war of thoughts within the field of doctrines.

The Arian Controversy arose over the doctrine of the Trinity. **Arius** a presbyter from Alexandria (AD 318) said that Christ was higher than man but inferior to God, and that He was not eternal. On the other side was **Anthanasius** of Alexandria who said that there was unity between the divinity of the Father and the divinity of Christ. This wrestling over doctrines went through the whole church. Constantine tried to solve the dispute and at last he called for a meeting of bishops in Nicea, Bethynia in AD 325.

Arius was very powerful politically and many from the upper class shared his thoughts. Anthanasius, still a deacon, was permitted to speak but not to vote. A friend said to him, "Anthanasius, you have the whole world against you". Anthanasius undisturbed replied, "**Be it so, then Anthanasius is against the whole world**". He managed to convince most of the council of the truth of his doctrines and was shortly thereafter elected as Bishop of Alexandria at only 33 years of age. He lived in peace until his death (AD 373) and his views finally became the general doctrine of the Christian Church.

The Apollinarian Controversy: Apollinaris, Bishop of Laodicea, (AD 360) asserted that Christ was not a real man – He was God in human form. The theologians held the view of Anthanasius that Christ was in union with God. The Council of Constantinople in AD 381 condemned the Apollinarian heresy and Apollinaris was expelled from the church.

The Pelagian Controversy: This controversy concerned sin and salvation. Pelagian taught that man does not inherit sin from Adam but each man must make his own choice. Against him came the mighty Augustine, who held the view that Adam represented the entire race and that man cannot be saved by his own choice, only by the will of God. The Pelagian views were condemned, while the views of Augustine became the standard of the church until 1600 when Wesley and others broke away from the Augustine doctrine that man cannot be saved by his own choice.

It is very important for the church not to be caught up in the net of doctrinal controversies,

but to follow the simple way of the people in Berea of whom it was said, "They were more noble than those in Thessalonica ... and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so", Acts 17:11. Let the Word of God and not man-made doctrines be our guideline.

D. The rise of Monasticism

In the early church there were no monks or nuns. The Christians lived in families and were members of society although they did not take part in worldly conduct. After Christianity became dominant in the empire, worldliness crept into the churches and many who sought a closer walk with God were dissatisfied and retired either alone or in groups. **Anthony** founded this movement in Egypt, where the climate was warm and only a few things were necessary for living. He lived alone in a cave for many years but became a leader with 2000 followers. They followed his example and the caves in Upper Egypt were thronged with them.

The Pillar Saints practiced a peculiar form of asceticism. The first of them was a Syrian monk called **Simon the Stylite** (meaning pillar). He left the monastery in AD 423 and in succession built several pillars each higher than the other. The last one was sixty feet high and four feet wide. He lived in turns on these pillars for 37 years. Thousands followed his example and Syria had thousands of pillar-saints. This form for asceticism never gained followers in Europe, probably because of the colder climate there.

Monasticism in Europe: The Monasticism in Europe spread more slowly than in Asia and Africa. Instead of persons living alone, monasteries were generally organised and directed. Work and prayer were combined. In the western world monasteries were ruled by the Benedict Order which was formed by **Benedict of Nursia** 480 – 550. He began as a hermit but ended up having formed 12 monasteries with 12 monks in each.

E. The growth of the Roman Church

Constantine had made Constantinople the Capital of the World. We shall now see how Rome became the Capital of the Church. While the Greek Orthodox Church was ruled by the state, the Patriarch of Rome claimed authority over the church in the western world, which developed into the Roman Catholic Church. There were several reasons for this.

Similarity to Imperial rule. There was a tendency to govern the church like a state with one head that had to be obeyed by all. Every bishop controlled his area, but who would control the bishops? There were bishops in almost every city who, in greater cities, were called patriarchs. There were patriarchs in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. The Roman patriarch took the title **Papa** (= **Father**), which later became **Pope**. In so doing he disobeyed the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:9, "Call no man your father upon earth, for one is your Father, who is in Heaven".

There was often strife among the patriarchs as to who should be the universal leader of the church. Rome got the upper hand and claimed that the Church of Rome was founded upon the apostles Peter and Paul. While the patriarchs were competing for positions of power they lost the power of the Holy Spirit. From this we can see that seeking a position of power originates from Lucifer, who said, "**I will exalt my throne above the stars (leaders) of God, I will sit on the mount of the congregation**". Isaiah 14:13. It is so easy to forget the humble words of the founder of the church, Christ, who said, "**Let it not be so among you,**

let him who will be great among you be your servant", Matthew 20:26.

Rome, having paved the way to become the capital of the Church had many wise leaders. For a long time she stood firm against intruding heresies and was true to Christianity. She brought into practice not only the spiritual but also the practical aspects of the words of Jesus, "Feed my Lambs", by introducing a worldwide social work. Monasteries, hospitals and schools were established and this gained popularity among the people. Missionaries were sent to all parts of the known world and as such fulfilled Christ's command, "Go ye and teach all the world". Unfortunately, their evangelical message was replaced by false doctrines and dogmas, which later entered the church. It also suffered from the strife of obtaining world dominion.

While the power of the church was growing, the political power of Rome was decreasing. During many years of reigning as a superior colonial power Rome had become very rich. The barbarians, living in poverty in the neighbouring countries, wanted these riches. They invaded Rome who, by now, was no longer used to war. Another calamity was the civil wars among members of the Senate trying to obtain the imperial throne. Some of the invading forces were: the Visigoths (AD 378), the Vandals (AD 406), the Burgundians (AD 414), the Franks (AD 420), the Saxons (AD 440) and the Huns (AD 450). Through these invasions Rome was reduced to a small area.

F. The fall of Rome AD 476

A German tribe, the Herulis, invaded and conquered Rome in AD 476. They dethroned the boy-Emperor **Romulus Augustus**. The German rebel Odoacer took the title King of Italy, and the Roman Empire as a world power came to an end.

According to scriptural prophecy (Daniel chapter 2) Rome should arise again in the form of a 10 kings federation. It will be interesting to see how this is going to happen! The Eastern Empire endured until 1453.

The invading tribes had been heathens, except for the Goths who had been converted to the Arian Christianity and had the Bible in their own language. Nearly all invading tribes became Christians, partly through the Goths, but mainly through the Roman Citizens. Through intermarriage with the Romans a completely new European race came into being. This weakened the original Roman race but we have already seen that, although the Roman Empire fell, the imperial influence of the Roman Church still existed.

G. Those who held fast (Revelation 2:12-17)

Although the church did settle in the world (where the throne of Satan is), there were those who held fast and did not deny His name. We shall mention a few.

Anthanasius 296 – 373, was a great defender of the true faith in the opening of the Arian controversy. He was exiled five times for his confession of faith. At the age of 33 he became Bishop of Alexandria and died in peace and honour.

Ambrose of Milan 340 – 397, although a layman, became Bishop of Milan. He rebuked the Emperor Theodosius for a cruel act. The Emperor repented and honoured Ambrose, who was chosen to preach at the Emperor's funeral. He wrote many books and had the honour of

receiving into the church the man who became the most famous church father: Augustine.

John, surnamed "Chrysostom" (the golden mouth) because of his eloquence of speech, was born in Antioch in AD 345. He became Patriarch of Constantinople in AD 398 and preached to vast congregations in the Church of St. Sophia. His independence and zeal for reform displeased many and he was banished and died in exile in 407. After his death he was justified and his body brought back to Constantinople and buried with honour.

Jerome 340 – 420, was the most learned of the Latin fathers. In Rome he received his education in literature and oratory (the art of speech) but he renounced worldly glamour. He established a monastery in Bethlehem and lived there for many years. He translated the Bible into Latin, the **Vulgate**, which is still the authorised Bible in the Catholic Church.

Augustine was born in 354 in Northern Africa. At age 33 he became a Christian through his mother Monica, the teachings of Ambrose of Milan and the study of the Epistles of Paul. He was made Bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa in 395 just as the invasion of the barbarians began. In his book The City of God he made a plea for Christianity to take the place of the dissolving Roman Empire. His confessions are a deep revelation of his own heart and life. He is known as the greatest Bible commentator since the Apostle Paul. He died in 430.

These men, and many others, "held fast and did not deny His Name". Through all the time of heresy, worldliness and controversy they ate from the "Hidden Manna". They shall one day receive a "White Stone". (In the courts in those days, the judge had two stones: a white stone and a black stone. When he passed his sentence, he handed the white stone to the one who was sentenced "not guilty" and the black stone to the "guilty" one.)

H. From imperial ruled Church to church ruled Empire

As the Patriarch of Rome got the upper hand, he took over the supreme rule of the universal church and therewith ends the Period of Pergamos. Following, we shall see the outcome of the church-ruled empire.

The Lord does not forget!

Three groups of false teachings are mentioned in the book of Revelation. They seem to have various things in common, which reveals that they are of heathen and occult origin.

1. **The teaching of Balaam**. Balaam was a false prophet who sold his services to the heathen King Balak and thereby caused Israel to compromise in their faith by worshipping idols, committing immorality and accepting false teachings and ideologies.
2. **The teaching of the Nicolaitans**. The Nicolaitans were a sect who, like the Balaamites, compromised their faith by worshipping idols, committing immorality, etc. They did not believe that the God of Israel created the world, but that it was created by other sources.
3. **The teaching of Jezebel**. Jezebel was the idolatrous wife of Ahab, who enticed Israel into idolatry with foreign gods and sexual immorality with heathen women. This **liberal** teaching had influenced the church and Christ spoke out a strong warning against it.

The **Ephesian** Christians were praised for hating them as Christ hates them.
The **Pergamos** Christians were rebuked for compromising with them.
The **Thyatire** Christians accepted and taught them and exposed them to the Lord's coming judgement.

God had said, "Because you tolerate false doctrines, I will fight against them with the sword of My mouth", Revelation 2:14-16.

The church as a whole did not repent, so God had to raise up a sword to confirm His spoken Word. The Words of Jesus against Jerusalem and the Temple were fulfilled when Titus conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in AD 70, and Hadrian made an end to the Jewish State in AD 135.

The **Sword of Mohammed**, who was born in Mecca in AD 570, was raised through his **Holy War**, the **Jihad**. The sword came, and the sword was sharp.

We can learn from the lesson on Smyrna that, when a church walks in the way of the Lord, no power can overcome her.

We can learn from the lessons on Pergamos and Thyatira that, when a church walks away from Christ and His judgement falls, no power can make it stand.

The Thyatira Period – The Medieval Church

Lesson 5

THE THYATIRA PERIOD (Revelation 2:18-19)

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| TIME: | From the fall of Rome (AD476) to the fall of Constantinople (AD1453). |
| CHRIST: | Eyes like fire. He sees. Feet like brass. He is coming for judgement. |
| EXHORTATION: | Hear what the Spirit says to the churches. |
| PRAISE: | Good works, faith, patience, service. |
| PROMISE: | To the <u>rest</u> who have not these doctrines – hold fast till I come. They shall rule over nations and have the morning star. |
| REBUKE: | Tolerating the deceiving woman Jezebel – Spiritual fornication. Idol worship e.g. Worship of Mary and Saints – Occultism (demon worship). The Pope's infallibility – Sale of indulgences. The Purgatory – Sale of Relics. Seeking political power – Killing in God's name. |
| CHALLENGE: | Repent. I have given you time to do so. |
| WARNING: | She shall be cast into a bed (of fornication?) and her lovers into great tribulation, and her children shall be killed. |

A. Introduction

THYATIRA was the least important of the seven. Her main industry was the dyeing of cloth into a beautiful scarlet-red or purple colour. This colour later became the distinctive mark for the time period that Thyatira represents. Thyatira represents the Jezebel (harlot) church. It is significant that the dominant church of the Middle Ages was the Roman Catholic Church. **The Vatican**, the home of the Pope, is garnished with velvet of this particular colour, and **Rome** is built upon seven hills, according to the Scriptures.

"The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits", Revelation 17:10. Heads of States often make a journey to Rome where they have an audience with the Pope. The reason for this will be explained in a later chapter.

B. I know your deeds and love and faith (Revelation 2:19)

The Lord spoke against the Medieval church regarding false doctrines, unholy alliances, political involvements, idolatry, etc., but we must not forget that the Lord also praised Thyatira. He said, "I know your **love** and **faith**, your **service** and **perseverance**, and you are now **doing more** than you did at first".

No church is proclaiming louder that **Jesus is the Son of God** than the Roman Catholic Church and the **virgin birth of Christ** is an unshakeable doctrine in their teachings. Considering the innumerable host of dedicated men and women, monks and nuns and priests who resigned from the pleasures of worldly life and unselfishly served mankind through schools, hospitals and social work and persevered doing more and more, it must be admitted that the Protestant churches fall far behind. When the Lord says, "I know", He means, "I see

it”, “I recognize it”. No doubt those faithful people who sacrificed their lives for service of their fellowmen shall not be without reward.

In practical matters concerning mankind and his conduct the Roman Catholic Church stands much firmer on certain truths than many Protestant churches, for example:

1. **Divorce.** While divorce has become a common thing in Protestant circles, this matter is taken much more seriously in the Roman Catholic Church.
2. **Free abortion** is totally condemned by the Vatican.
3. **Homosexuality.** While homosexuality, even marriage of homosexuals, is widely accepted in certain Protestant circles, the Vatican openly speaks against it.
4. **Euthanasia** (mercy killing) is being more and more accepted in secular and Protestant circles, but the Roman Catholic Church stands against it.

Although there is much to praise the Roman Catholic Church for, the One who has **eyes like fire** (He sees through) and **feet like brass** (He is coming for judgement) speaks out these alarming words, "**I have this against you I will cast her on a bed ... I will strike her children dead**".

Fortunately, there was a group within the system to whom He said, "**Hold on till I come, you will rule the nations, you will have the morning star**".

The Scarlet Woman in Revelation 17:1-6 seems to qualify for the title of being the Harlot that sits upon many waters, which means that she has influence and dominion over the mass of peoples. Verse 2 explains, "**Kings of the Earth have committed fornication with her**". World rulers came in submission to her and inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk by the vine of her fornication. She was arrayed in purple, (the colour of Thyatira) and she was riding on a Beast with ten horns, having the same colour. The ten horns, identical with the ten toes of the Image of Nebuchadnezzar – which are a prophetic symbol of the Revived Roman Empire, today seem to be manifested in The European Community, also called The Rome Treaty. The fallen Rome of 476 is alive again. Revelation 17:5 speaks of her as the "Mother of Harlots". Verse six says that she was drunk with the blood of the saints. This speaks of the time when the church herself persecuted and killed true believers as heretics – false believers. For example: **Johan Hus, Jerome Savonarola, the Albigenses and the Day of St. Bartholomew in August 1572**, when 70,000 Protestants were brutally murdered in France.

The Medieval Church did exactly that. Therefore this church system shall be cast upon a bed. Many have wondered what kind of bed it might be. It is believed that the Lord – after offering her repentance in vain – will cast her on a bed of fornication so that she can continue in her self-chosen life of adultery and join (sit upon) the Beast – Antichrist, only later to be destroyed by him. "**And the Beast shall hate the Harlot, and shall make her desolate, and burn her with fire**", **Revelation 17:16**. She is the great city that reigns over the Kings of the Earth. Revelation 17:18.

C. **The Harlot (Revelation 17:5) versus the Bride of Christ**

What is a harlot? A bride or a married woman who sells her body to another for personal

gain is a harlot. So, since the church is the Bride of Christ, she becomes a harlot spiritually if she turns away from the Words of Jesus and, for personal gain, becomes involved with sins, false teachings and practice. Jesus said, "**Remain in Me and I will remain in you**".

The Harlot

1. Mother of Harlots.
2. False doctrines.
3. Alliance with the World.
4. Alliance with non-Christian religions.
5. Seeking political power.
6. Believes and practices occultism.
7. Membership by baptism.
8. Called: The Great Babylon.
9. On the forehead: Babylon.
10. Mystery of a Prostitute.

The Bride of Christ

1. Bride of Christ.
2. Keeping the Word of God.
3. Separated unto Christ.
4. Built only upon one foundation: Christ.
5. Seeking the Power of God.
6. Believes and practices the fullness of the Spirit.
7. Membership by being born-again.
8. Called: The New Jerusalem.
9. On the forehead: God's name.
10. Mystery of Christ, Ephesians 3:1-6.

THE DAUGHTERS OF THE HARLOT:

1. The Medieval Church was the dominating church during the Thyatira Period.
2. Through Martin Luther the call came, "Come out of her my people". Revelation 18:4.
3. Through the Reformation Protestant churches were formed in many countries.
4. By being born-again many of the Harlot's children became "Children of God".
5. Many Protestant churches did not completely break with Rome's teachings and practices.
6. Today many Protestant churches form a worldwide organisation of churches with a trend to reunite with Rome. They came out from her, but they never broke the umbilical cord.
7. Many prominent leaders, both in the Catholic and the Protestant churches today, are eager to form co-operation with leaders of other religions in order to build a new **One World Religion** which comprises all religions. This is called **The Interfaith Movement**. When this movement becomes a reality we have a modern **Pantheon** where all gods are equal. The first Christians did not accept it. Will the Christians of today accept it? **Will you?**

D. The Medieval church

In the Pergamos period (the Imperial Church) we saw that the Patriarch of Rome got the upper hand and that Rome rose to become the Capital of the Church. We also saw how false doctrines mingled with pagan practices entered the church and after a while became more dominant as they won more adherents, while only a minority of people held fast to the scriptural doctrines.

It was not enough for the Patriarch of Rome to become the Universal Bishop and to have Rome as the Capital of the Church. Following, we shall see him claiming to become the Ruler over Nations. The development of Papal power is an outstanding fact in the ten centuries of the Middle Ages.

The course of the Medieval Church was in three stages: Growth, Culmination and Decline.

Growth: The Papal power began with the pontificate of **Gregory I in AD 590**. Whenever a Pope assumed office he changed his name. Gregory was named the Great because of his achievements and power.

1. He firmly withstood the claim of the Patriarch of Constantinople to the title Universal Bishop.
2. He made the church the actual ruler in the Province around Rome thus paving the way for his political power.
3. He developed certain unscriptural doctrines (dogmas) for the church.

“The Spirit clearly says that, in the latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons”, 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

E. What is the difference between doctrine and dogma?

1. **A Doctrine** is a teaching that is built upon scripture. It can be:
 - a) Correct when it is in agreement with Scripture.
 - b) False when it is taken out of context and turned into an opinion which is opposed to the true meaning.
2. **A Dogma** is a man-made statement that is given the same authority as the Holy Scriptures and is therefore always wrong. For example:
 - a) **The adoration of images**: e.g. Sculptures of Mary, the saints and the crucifix of Christ.
 - b) **Purgatory**: A place of fire where the deceased goes after his death. There he is purged from his sins by severe suffering before he is ready for heaven. The time he has to stay in Purgatory depends on the degree of his sins and on the amount of money his family could pay to the church, so that the priest could forgive and release him. Such a dogma is false.
 - c) **Transubstantiation**: This is the belief that the Holy Communion changes into the Body and Blood of Christ. Such a doctrine is absurd. Jesus gave His disciples the words, "As often as you eat and drink this, remember My death till I come". He never spoke of any transformation of the Bread and the Wine.
 - d) **Celibate Life**: The monks, nuns and fathers of the Catholic Church are forbidden to marry, which is unscriptural. Paul said in 1 Timothy 3:2 "A bishop (elder) must be the husband of one wife". Watch out for false teachings.

Dogmas taught by the Roman Catholic Church:

| Dogma | Introduced AD |
|---|----------------------|
| Praying for the dead | 300 |
| Veneration of angels and dead saints, use of images | 375 |
| Beginning of exaltation of Mary | 431 |
| Doctrine of Purgatory (Gregory I) | 593 |
| Prayers directed to Mary and dead saints | 600 |
| Kissing the Pope's foot (Pope Constantine) | 709 |
| Worship of the cross, images and relics | 786 |
| Blessing of holy Water mixed with salt | 850 |
| Canonisation of dead saints (Pope John XV) | 995 |
| Celibacy of priesthood (Pope Gregory VII) | 1079 |
| The Rosary (Peter the Hermit) | 1090 |

| | |
|---|------|
| Inquisition (instituted by the Council of Verona) | 1184 |
| Sale of Indulgences | 1190 |
| Transubstantiation (Pope Innocent III) | 1215 |
| Auricular confession to the priest instead of God (Pope Innocent III) | 1215 |
| Adoration of the Wafer (Pope Honorius III) | 1220 |
| Bible forbidden to laymen (Council of Toulouse) | 1229 |
| Immaculate Conception of Virgin Mary (Pope Pius IX) | 1854 |
| Infallibility of the Pope in matters of faith (proclaimed by the Vatican Council) | 1870 |
| Assumption of Mary (bodily ascension to heaven shortly after her death) (Pope Pius XII) | 1950 |
| Mary proclaimed Mother of the Church (Pope Paul VI) | 1965 |

F. Papal power

The reasons for Papal Power.

1. **Power of righteousness.** The church stood between the rulers of the land and its subjects to avoid tyranny and injustice and was therefore favoured by the people.
2. **The uncertainty of government rule.** While political power was wavering, the power of the church was steady and reliable. Therefore, weak rulers often called upon the church for help and, in return, handed over possessions and power to the church that gained more and more political power. As a result the church had her strong allies everywhere, and she never failed to advance her own interests.
3. **Frauds.** The church took advantage of the ignorance of the people. Some issued false writings under the pretence that they were written by others. Being ignorant, the people accepted these writings as true.
 - a) **The Donation of Constantine.** This was supposed to be a letter from Constantine to Bishop Sylvester (Bishop of Rome 314 – 335) giving him supreme power in Europe and power over emperors. This letter was false and it is unlikely that an emperor would voluntarily put his authority under the power of a subject.
 - b) **The False Decrees of Isedore (AD 850).** These were writings that claimed that the Bishops of Rome had received documents from the Apostles, proclaiming the supremacy of the Pope in Rome over the universal church as well as the independence from the state. (If this was true, why did the bishops of Rome never make this claim before AD 850?)

The culmination of Papal Power (1073 – 1216).

Papal power reached its peak during the rule of **Gregory VII**, also known by his family name **Hildebrand**. During this time the papacy had almost absolute power, not only over the church, but also over the nations of Europe.

1. **Hildebrand reformed the clergy**, which had become demoralised and **compelled celibacy** of priesthood.
2. **He freed the church from the domination of the state** by putting an end to nomination of popes and bishops by kings and emperors. (It used to be a custom for a

bishop to receive a staff and a ring from his king or emperor. In this way the Bishop's Staff represented worldly recognition.)

- 3. He made the church supreme over the state.** The Emperor Henry VI once offended Hildebrand who excommunicated him from the Imperial Throne. In 1077 the Emperor laid aside everything belonging to royalty, stood with bare feet and clad in wool for three days and nights waiting before the castle in Canossa in Northern Italy where the Pope was staying, in order to show his submission and to receive forgiveness. The Pope forgave him and installed him again as emperor, but as subject to him. As soon as Henry had regained the Imperial Crown he went to war against the Pope and drove him out of Rome. Hildebrand died soon after, leaving this testimony, "I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and therefore I die in exile".

Innocent III (1198 – 1216) was another Pope with outstanding power. In his ordination speech he said, "The successor of St. Peter stands between God and man; below God, above man, judge of all, judged by none".

In an official letter he wrote, "The Pope has been committed not only to the church, but also to the whole world, with the right of disposing of imperial and all other crowns". He took upon himself the government of the **City of Rome**, making himself the supreme Lord, thereby establishing what today is known as the **State of the Vatican**. He excommunicated King John of England and forced him to surrender his crown to him and to receive it again as the Pope's subject.

Warning: The fall of Lucifer (the devil who at first was an archangel) came about because of self-exaltation. He said, "**I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars (leaders) of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation**". The Lord replied, "**Yet you shall be brought down**". Isaiah 14:13-15.

The decline of Papal Power.

The decline of papal power began with **Boniface VIII in 1303**. Among the nations the spirit of nationality began to compete with loyalty to the Pope. Although the Pope continued making high claims, he found them ignored. He quarrelled with King Philip the Fair of France, who went to war against him, seized him and put him in jail where he died of grief. From 1305 – 1377 the Papacy was transferred to Avignon of France.

In 1377 Pope Gregory X returned to Rome, which has since been the residence of Popes. They have continued making high claims, but have been unable to enforce them except within their own ranks.

G. The rise of Islam

Only twenty years before the Western churches entered the **Dark Ages** under the papacy, an Arab boy, **Mohammed**, was born in Mecca (AD 570). Nobody could have imagined what influence this boy was going to have on the world and especially on Christianity. He began his career as a prophet and reformer in 610. Because of persecution he fled from **Mecca in AD 622**. This historical flight is called the **Hegira**. The Moslem calendar begins from the year AD 611.

His religion is called "**Islam**", which means "**submission**" to the will of god, **Allah**. His

followers are called **Moslems**. There is a great similarity between Islam and the Christian faith in doctrines and principles, but a great difference in belief and action. They call their god Allah, which corresponds to the Hebrew word El Elah or **Elohim**, meaning “the Almighty”. They believe in the ministry of angels among men, they accept Moses and the prophets and the church fathers that lived before Mohammed. **They accept Jesus as a prophet but not as the Son of God** and they see Him as being inferior to Mohammed. They only accept the Bible as far as it agrees with the **Koran**, the holy book of Islam. They believe in heaven and in hell and that there shall be a final resurrection. Generally they are Christian-like. They have a simple doctrine and are in opposition to worship of images, idol worship and alcohol. They deny that dead saints can pray for them – each believer must come personally before the face of God.

H. What is the difference?

One of the differences is the method of conversion. The Christian faith is a peace movement with the motto: Preach the Gospel, hear and believe. Islam conquers by means of the sword. Wherever they went they killed the men who would not kneel to Mohammed, took their women into harems and sent their children away to far distant provinces where they were trained in the faith of Islam.

Within 200 years Palestine, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia Minor (the place of the seven churches) were conquered by Islam and brought to the feet of Mohammed. Only Constantinople and Rome remained. As a result of the cruel methods of the Muslims, the Christian churches as well as every religion that would not submit to Islam were almost eliminated. The Muslims went as far as Spain and were about to enter France with their cruel hordes. Unlike the weaker Christians in Asia Minor, **Charles Martel** organised an army in Southern France and defeated the Muslims at the **Battle of Tours in AD 732**. Christ had brought the sword of judgement and removed the lamp stands, exactly as He had said He would. For centuries Islam was strong in the East and weak in the West, but today they are flooding the world and are an unavoidable factor in the religious realm as well as in trade and politics.

I. The holy Roman Empire

Charlemagne's empire, sometimes called the German Empire, went through different phases. Before this empire came into being, the countries of Europe, which were west of the Adriatic Sea, were in disorder and were ruled by different warring tribes. Yet, in spite of this, there was a desire among the nations to see the Roman Empire restored again. This was also the driving force behind Adolph Hitler in the Second World War.

The Frenchman Charlemagne – also known as Karl the Great in Germany established Charlemagne's Empire. He was a grandson of Charles Martel, the King of the Franks (a German tribe controlling a large part of France) who defeated the Moslems at Tours in AD 732. Charlemagne became the head of most western countries in AD 800 and was crowned as Emperor by Pope Leo III. He was a wise and good ruler and a reformer who promoted education in the church.

The successors of Charlemagne were weak and selfish. Disagreement between them caused the dwindling away of the imperial power. Several kings and emperors later tried to build the empire up again, and although some were more successful than others, it dwindled away

in the end.

J. Separation of the Latin and Greek churches in 1054

The Latin and Greek churches separated formally in AD 1054, although in practice they had been separated long before. There had always been strife over who was the greater between the Pope in Rome and the Patriarch in Constantinople. Finally, in 1054, the Pope's messenger delivered a decree of excommunication to the St. Sophia Church, whereupon the Patriarch in turn issued a decree excommunicating Rome and the churches submitting to Rome.

The causes of separation:

1. **Doctrinal difference** concerning the nature of the Holy Spirit. The Roman Church said that the Holy Spirit came from the Father and the Son, whilst the Greek Church said that the Holy Spirit only came from the Father. This difference caused years of arguments, writing of innumerable books and even bloodshed.
2. **Priestly Marriage** was forbidden by Rome but allowed in the Greek Church.
3. **Adoration of Images** was practised in the Roman Church, whilst it was forbidden in the Greek Church (although religious paintings were held in reverence).
4. **Holy Communion**. Unleavened bread is used in the Roman Church while normal bread is used in the Greek Church.
5. **Political cause**. After the fall of Rome the western nations wanted to be under Constantinople, but with the rise of the Holy Roman Empire, which took the place of the original Roman Empire, there was a disassociation with the Greek Emperor.
6. **Claims of Rome**. The greatest reason for separation was the persistent claim of Rome to be the ruling church and its Popes to be the Universal Bishops. In Rome the church dominated the state, whereas in Constantinople the opposite was the case. These issues caused the final split between the churches of Rome and Constantinople.

In 1984 the Pope and the Patriarch embraced one another again – a daughter had come home. Although they are separated in organization, they are still of one spirit.

K. The Crusades

A great movement in the Middle Ages was the Crusades. For centuries pilgrimages were made to the Holy Land. At first the Moslems welcomed them, but later they were intimidated, robbed and killed because they were Christians. **The Emperor Alexis** asked **Pope Urban II** to assist with warriors from Europe to relieve Palestine from Moslem oppression. The challenge was heard throughout Europe and the spirit of the crusades was born.

There were seven major Crusades:

1. **The First Crusade (1095 – 1099): Pope Urban II** proclaimed this crusade at the Council of Clermont. Many soldiers took the cross as their sign to take Palestine from the Saracens (Arab Moslems). A deeper reason for the crusades was to get an

opportunity to punish the Jews for killing Jesus. They called the Jews the **Christ-killers**, forgetting that **Rome** had been very much involved in **the same event**. Before they could get organised, a monk, **Peter the Hermit**, gathered 40,000 undisciplined men and set off towards the Holy Land. His mission was a failure. Many of his men died in the battle or were taken as slaves.

The real crusade started under **Godfred of Bullion**, Belgium and others. They were well trained and succeeded in taking Jerusalem and nearly all of Palestine in 1099. They established a kingdom that lasted until 1187 in spite of wars and unrest.

2. **The Second Crusade (1147 – 1149)**: This was a reaction to the news that the Saracens were conquering outlying provinces and that Jerusalem was in danger. Under the leadership of **Bernard of Clairvoux, Louis VII of France and Conrad III of Germany** an army was sent. Jerusalem was saved, but they were not strong enough to regain the lost land.
3. **The Third Crusade (1188 – 1192)**: In 1187 the Saracens took Jerusalem and the kingdom came to an end. The fall of the city resulted in a new crusade which was led by three European rulers: **Emperor Frederick Barbarossa of Germany, King Philip of France and King Richard I of England**, also called “Lionheart”. Frederick drowned and the remaining two quarrelled. Philip went home and Richard did not have the courage to fight the battle alone. He negotiated with Saladin, king of the Saracens, and the pilgrims were once more allowed to visit the Holy Grave of Jesus.
4. **The Fourth Crusade (1201 – 1204)**: This proved to be a failure and caused great harm to the Christian church. Failing to conquer the Moslems, Rome turned on their fellow brethren in Constantinople. The city was taken and plundered, and they set up their own rule. This rule lasted for fifty years and then the cruel Turkish Moslems took the city. In this way Rome, who had fought against the Moslems in Jerusalem, had now lost to them in Constantinople.

Lesson: When the Christians fail to fight the enemy, they begin to fight one another.

5. **The Fifth Crusade (1228 – 1229)**: **The Emperor Frederick II**, although dethroned by the Pope, led an army to Palestine. He negotiated a treaty whereby Jerusalem and other cities were surrendered to the Christians, and he crowned himself as King of Jerusalem. (From then onwards the title "King of Jerusalem" was held by all German emperors and afterwards by the Austrian emperors until 1835.) The Pope was not satisfied and while he and the Emperor were quarrelling, Jerusalem was retaken by the Mohammedans in 1244 and remained under their control until the English General Allenby freed her in 1917. Palestine (now Israel) became an English province.
6. **The Sixth Crusade**: This was undertaken by **Louis IX of France**. He invaded Palestine via Egypt, was defeated and taken prisoner by the Mohammedans. He was later released and returned to France.
7. **The Seventh and last Crusade (1270 – 1272)**: This was also under the leadership of **Louis together with Prince Edward of England**. Louis died in Tunis (Africa). His son made peace with the Mohammedans and Edward returned to England and was crowned as **King Edward I**.

Failure:

After almost 200 years of repeated crusades with much effort and bloodshed in the name of Christianity, the Crusades still proved to be a failure. There were many reasons for this.

1. **Lack of training**, leadership and submission, as in the case of Peter the Hermit.
2. **Quarrels among the leaders.** In most crusades there was quarrelling and jealousy. Therefore they could not stand against the united, well-trained, fearless Moslems.
3. **Narrow mindedness.** They knew how to take the land, but they did not know how to keep and protect it.
4. **They had forgotten their Master's Words**, "Not with might and not with strength, but with my Spirit".

Some good results from the Crusades:

1. **The pilgrims were protected** and could freely visit the Holy Grave.
2. **The Moslem aggression in Europe was checked.** They were expelled from Spain in 1492, and in 1683 an invasion of Austria was turned back near Vienna. Turkish defeat marked the decline of the Turkish Empire.
3. **Acquaintance among nations.** Crusaders were people from many countries and they found that they had many things in common. Respect and alliances were formed among nations. The crusaders brought many Eastern products home and in return offered their products. This promoted international trade.
4. **The church gained power.** She bought lands and increased in wealth, but the wealth and unscrupulous use of power by churchmen caused dissatisfaction and paved the way for the approaching reformation.

L. Development of Monasticism, Art and Literature

Monastic Orders:

1. **The Benedictines (AD 529).** Benedict formed this order at Monte Casino in Italy. They promoted Christianity in the North. They required obedience to their leaders as well as an oath of poverty. The order was active in industrial work, forestry, draining swamps, tilling fields, etc.
2. **The Cistercians arose in 1098.** Their aim was to strengthen the discipline among the Benedictines. Formed by St. Robert it was strengthened by **Bernard of Clairvoux** in 1112.
3. **The Franciscans.** In 1209 **Francis of Assisi** (famous for his holiness and deep consecration to Christ) formed this order. Their ministry is best known for caring for the sick and suffering.
4. **The Dominicans.** In 1215 **Dominic** formed this order. They were mainly preachers.

Benefits from Monasticism:

1. **Centres of refuge** in troubled times.
2. **Hospitality.** It was their duty to reach out to those in need.
3. **Agriculture.** The monks made great contributions to farming.
4. **Literature.** Monks faithfully recorded history and preserved art and literature in their monasteries. Without these records our knowledge would be very limited.
5. **Education.** The most prominent teachers were monks. They had time to study and were well-educated and therefore suitable teachers.
6. **Mission work.** They sent missionaries to many countries.

Bad results from Monasticism:

1. **Exaltation of Celibacy.** In the beginning the Roman Church did not enforce celibacy and many priests were married and had families. When the Popes enforced celibacy, the priests had to obey because of their vows of absolute obedience to the Pope. An untold number of homes were broken, wives were in despair and had to support themselves or become nuns, while the children were taken from the parents. Another calamity was that noble men and women, who were so needed in social life, were excluded. This abnormal and unscriptural practice of non-marriage had other great dangers, namely immorality between monks and nuns, homosexuality among men and lesbianism among women.
2. **Luxury and laziness.** The growing wealth of the church resulted in luxury and idleness among the inhabitants of the monasteries. Church property was tax free, but the working population had to bear the burden of taxation.

Medieval Art and Literature.

The Middle Ages contributed much to the world of art, literature and architecture. Great Cathedrals were built as well as the universities of Paris in France and Oxford and Cambridge in England.

M. The beginning of religious reform

Remember that this is the Thyatira period which, according to Revelation 2:19, was an industrious time during which many good works were performed. Unfortunately this period did also have a Jezebel factor, namely false doctrines. In the midst of this the Lord saw that "There were some who did not have this doctrine", Revelation 2:24-26. Here we shall mention:

1. **The Albigensians (1170)** circulated the New Testament although this was forbidden by Rome. They opposed the Roman doctrines of purgatory and image worship. Pope Innocent III's crusade against them nearly exterminated the population of that region.
2. **The Waldensians (1170).** The founder was Peter Waldo, a businessman of Lyons, who read, explained, preached and circulated scriptures and spoke against the

doctrines of Rome. He formed an evangelisation team, was persecuted and driven out of France. He found a hiding place in the valleys of northern Italy.

3. **John Wycliff (1329 – 1384)** is called the Morning Star of Reformation. He began a movement for freedom from Roman power and for reformation in the church. He was a Doctor of Theology at Oxford University. He attacked the beggar monks and monasticism, rejected the Pope and wrote against transubstantiation. He modelled the services after the New Testament pattern. He translated the New Testament into English in 1383 and with the help of friends completed the translation of the Old Testament in the year of his death in 1384.
4. **John Huss (1369 – 1415)** was Rector of the University of Prague. He was a reader of Wycliff's writings and preached his doctrines, especially proclaiming freedom from papal authority. He was banned by the Pope, captured and **burned to death as a heretic in 1415**. While the flames were licking his body he cried out this prophecy: "**Today you burn a goose, but in a hundred years a swan shall come, whose wings you cannot shorten**". He died singing. One hundred years later, in 1517, the unconquerable reformer, Martin Luther, nailed his 95-point thesis to the church door in Wittenberg in Germany. In an old Hussittic church outside Cape Town there is a statue of a goose. It has been erected to remind the coming generations of this prophecy of John Huss.
5. **Jerome Savonarola (1452 – 1498)** was a monk of the Dominican order in Florence, Italy. He preached against the evil of his day, was imprisoned by the Pope, hanged and his body burned in 1498.

The fall of Constantinople AD 1454.

Historians see the fall of Constantinople as the dividing point between the medieval and the modern times. The Greek Empire never recovered from the conquest by the crusaders in 1204. Strong natural and artificial defences had long protected this city, but in the end Constantinople fell into the hands of the Turkish Moslems under the leadership of **Mohammed II in 1453**. In one day the beautiful St. Sophia Church, built by Constantine the Great as a Triumph of Christian Victory, was transformed into a mosque.

N. Think about these things

In our study we have seen kingdoms rise and fall, political and spiritual leaders who had world dominion one day and the next day they were prisoners or dead. We saw the destruction of the Jewish temple and the dispersion of the Jewish nation. We saw the victory of the church over the Roman Empire and later her fall into paganism under the power of an apostate church system and under the sword of Mohammed.

We saw the fall of Rome as a political power and the decline of the Roman church and how the unconquerable Constantinople fell – first into the hands of the crusaders, then into the hands of the Turkish Moslems. We followed the Crusaders' desperate but failing attempts to take Jerusalem and Palestine from the Mohammedan forces.

Like the dawn the life of the first church awakened again, but was quenched as quickly as it sprang forth. It seemed as if all efforts were futile. The night of the Middle Ages was long and dark, but now we stand before the daybreak, we stand before **the beginning of the end**.

The Sardis Period – The Reformed Church

Lesson 6

THE SARDIS PERIOD (Revelation 3:1-6)

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| TIME: | From the fall of Constantinople (AD 1453) to the end of the Thirty Years War (1648). |
| CHRIST: | The Perfect Holy One. |
| EXHORTATION: | Hear what the Spirit says to the churches. |
| PRAISE: | Some have not defiled their garments. You have kept My Word. |
| PROMISE: | You shall walk with Me in white linen. |
| REBUKE: | Dead works. The reformers lost vision. Diversities in doctrines. |
| WARNING: | "I will come as a thief"; "The Day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night". |

A. Introduction

SARDIS was one of the richest cities in Asia Minor, but morally degenerated and famous for idol worship and worship of the goddess **Cybele**.

Christ is portrayed as "having the Seven Spirits of God". Seven stands for perfection. He recognises the teaching of the church and encourages them to hold fast, but their works (**controversies** between the reformers, **Luther, Calvin and Zwingli**) ended up in dead works. Although separated from Rome, they in some way lost their course. Therefore the Lord says, "**Repent, watch, the Day of the Lord is coming**".

B. History of the reformation period

The reformation began in Germany and spread all over Northern Europe, resulting in many churches separating from Rome. The following events paved the way for the Reformation:

- 1. The Renaissance.** This means "the awakening of Europe to a new interest in literature, art and science, and the change from medieval to modern ways of thought". Thinkers and writers, yes even the youth, turned to classics, such as Greek and Latin and were drawn away from religious life, although not anti-religious they were sceptical and inquiring.
- 2. The invention of printing** just in time for the Reformation. **Johann Guthenberg** made this invention in **1456**. Before this all books were hand-written. **The first printed book was the Bible**. The cost of a Bible was equivalent to a man's yearly salary. Consider what a Bible would cost today!
- 3. A Spirit of Nationalism** was rising in Europe and with it an unwillingness to submit to foreign rule over national churches. They were too poor to support the building of stately and magnificent buildings in Rome (e.g. St. Peter's Cathedral and the Vatican), as well as the paying of **Peter's Pence** (in England an annual tribute of a penny from every landowner was paid to the Pope in Rome).

The Reformation in Germany.

When the spirit of reform and independence was awakening throughout Europe, the flame burst forth in **Saxony in Germany** under the leadership of **Martin Luther**, a monk and professor at the University of Wittenberg,

The reigning **Pope Leo X** needed large sums of money for completing St. Peter's Church. He permitted an agent, **John Tetzel**, to go through Germany selling "**Forgiveness Certificates**" signed by the Pope himself to grant forgiveness of all sins, both for the buyer and for his friends, living or dead, with or without confession and repentance. Tetzel told the people, "**As soon as the coin in the money box clinks, the soul out of purgatory springs**". Luther preached against Tetzel and his selling of "forgiveness certificates".

The beginning of the reformation: Luther's Thesis.

October 31, 1517 is the date seen by historians as the beginning of the Reformation. On that morning Martin Luther nailed a 95-point thesis onto the church door in Wittenberg. Most of those points relate to the sale of indulgences as well as discrediting the authority of the Pope.

The church leaders tried in vain to make Luther retract his statement. He was banned by a "bull" (a letter or order from a pope is called a bull, which means seal). On December 10, 1520 Martin Luther burned this bull in the gates of Wittenberg in the presence of professors and students from the University and the people. This act was Luther's final break with the Roman Catholic Church.

Martin Luther in Worms (AD1521).

Martin Luther was asked to stand trial before the Council of Rulers in the city of **Worms**. The Emperor had promised Luther "safe conduct", meaning that no harm would be done to him. Luther's friends were afraid that the same would happen to him as happened 100 years earlier to Johan Huss. Nothing could stop Luther. He said these famous words, "**I will go to Worms though as many devils are aiming at me as there are tiles on the roofs**".

Luther's first appearance in Worms.

It must have been overwhelming for Martin Luther to see the spectators before him. There sat **Charles the Emperor** and various rulers of the Empire together with bishops, archbishops and cardinals, all in their scarlet robes. There were ambassadors and deputies from the various countries of Europe. About five thousand of the most prominent spiritual and political leaders of Europe were gathered together and before them stood a lonely monk, the son of a poor miner. Dressed in his monk's frock and hood, he stood there pale-faced and worn, but inside him the Spirit of the Lord was burning with an unquenchable flame.

At the first meeting he was asked to recant his writings and statements. Martin Luther asked for 24 hours to consider the request, which was granted. It was during these hours that a friend overheard his prayer:

"O, Almighty and Everlasting God! How terrible is this world! Behold, it opened its mouth to swallow me up, and I have so little trust in you! How weak is the flesh, and Satan how strong! My last hour is come; my condemnation has been pronounced! O God! O God! Do

help me against all the wisdom of the world! Do this; you should do this; you alone; for this is not my work, but yours. The cause is yours and it is a righteous and eternal cause".

After a time of silence he continued:

"Lord, where are you? O my God! Where are you? Come! Come! I am ready. I am ready to lay down my life for your truth ... patient as a lamb. For it is a cause of justice – it is yours. I will not separate yourself from me, neither now nor in eternity! And though the world should be filled with devils, though my body, which is still the work of your hands should be slain, be stretched out upon the pavement, should be cut in pieces, reduced to ashes, my soul is yours! Yes! Your Word is my assurance of it. My soul belongs to you. I shall abide with you forever. Amen. O God help me, Amen".

Martin Luther's second appearance before the council.

At the second meeting the following day the requests were repeated. Without hesitation he declared that he could not retract anything except what could be proven wrong according to the Holy Scriptures. He closed with these words, "**Here I stand, I can do nothing else. God help me, Amen**". Since the promise of "safe conduct" could not be broken, a plot was formed to kill Martin Luther on his way home.

Shortly after he had left Worms, he was arrested by a group of soldiers dressed as bandits. Luther thought that the Emperor had broken his promise, but he found out later that the soldiers were sent by the **Electoer Frederick of Saxony**, who had heard of the killing plot. Frederick was a friend and supporter of Luther and was afraid that Luther would be caught and killed. Luther was kept hidden as a prisoner in the Castle of Wartburg for a year, but he spent this time **translating the New Testament into the German language**. His translation is still the most read translation in Germany. Coming from Wartburg in 1522, he assumed leadership of the movement for a reformed church.

The Protestants.

Areas of Germany were soon divided. The Southern parts clung to Rome, while the Northern parts followed Luther. A council was held at **Spire in 1529**, hoping to reconcile the two parties. The Catholic rulers were in the majority. They condemned the Lutheran doctrines and forbade any Lutheran teaching in the areas where Catholics were predominant, whilst demanding the right to exercise Catholicism freely in Lutheran areas. The Lutheran rulers made a formal protest and from that day they were known as Protestants.

Reformation in other countries.

Switzerland: Although the reformation in Switzerland started at the same time, it was independent of the one in Germany. **Ulrich Zwingli**, who in 1517 attacked the "Forgiveness of sins through Pilgrimage", was the leader of this movement. In 1522 he finally broke away from Rome. This Reformation was more radical than that in Germany. A civil war broke out between the Catholics and the Protestants during which **Zwingli was slain in 1531**. The Reformation continued with a leader who was the greatest theologian since Augustine: **John Calvin**. At the age of twenty-seven his teachings became the standard for Protestant doctrine.

Scandinavia: Denmark, Norway and Sweden were at that time all under the Danish Crown. King Christian II accepted the Lutheran views.

France: The Reformation in France had terrible consequences. In 1512, **Jacques de Lefevre** preached "justification by faith". This was the same teaching as Martin Luther's. Two parties were formed, but a terrible persecution took place against the Protestants.

On **St. Bartholomew's Day, August 1572**, the Catholics planned an attack on the Protestants. The signal to start the attack was the **ringing of the church bells**. To the sound of the chiming church bells that filled the air of Paris, one of the most horrible massacres in history took place. On that day and in the following weeks, an estimated army of approximately 70,000 – 100,000 Christian heroes, including women and children, laid down their lives for Christ.

Other countries: The reformation went on victoriously from country to country.

C. The principles of Reformation

1. **Scriptural Religion.** The Roman church had taken away the authority of the Bible. It withheld the Scriptures from the people. The Reformers brought a forgotten Bible back to the people and placed the Words of the Bible above the authority of the church.
2. **Rational Religion.** The Roman church stood between God and man. The Reformers brought people face to face with God.
3. **A Spiritual Religion.** The Roman church was overloaded with formalities, rites and ceremonies, whereas the Reformers emphasised the "inward life" and brought back the doctrine of salvation in Christ by faith only.

D. The Counter Reformation

A great move was made by the Roman Church to regain lost ground, to subvert the Protestant faith and to promote the Catholic Church in foreign lands. The movement was called "The Counter Reformation".

The councils in Trent (1545 – 1563) were held in order to bridge the gap between the two divisions, but in vain. The Roman Church introduced planned reforms, which they were never able to bring about. Another approach was to be tried, namely practised by **the Jesuits**.

E. The rise of the Jesuits – Ignatius Loyola (1491 – 1556)

All attempts to quench the Reformation had failed, but something had to be done. An army was to be raised whose clothing would be black and similar to that of a priest. They would take vows of poverty and love and were to **"take care of the Christians"**. What the term "to take care of" meant in this connection, only time would show. Under this guise the work of the Counter Reformation would be accomplished.

Ignatius Loyola was born in Spain in 1491. He always wished to be engaged in war and fought against the French. He was wounded in both legs, and a long time of sickness followed. During this time he read religious books and felt drawn to the life of a monk. He dedicated himself to the **Virgin Mary and to the Church**. After having travelled barefoot to Rome and Jerusalem he arrived in Paris where he met **Francis Xavier**, who later did a great work in India. They joined forces and soon a small group of 8 – 9 men formed **the Society of Jesus**.

The beginning of the order of the Jesuits.

On August 15, 1534 they took their vows. Loyola had prepared a book called **Spiritual Exercises**. A Jesuit later said, "**This book is truly written by the finger of God and delivered to Ignatius by the Holy Mother of God**".

Pope Paul III approved of the plan, and in **1540 The Society of Jesus** was authorised with Loyola as the General Superior responsible only to the Pope himself. Because of this and because of the fact that the Jesuits wore black priestly garments, the General Superior of the Jesuits has been called "**the Black Pope**".

The real objectives of the Jesuits.

They spread themselves over the whole world as a secret network in the interests of the Pope and the Catholic Church. All information gained was supplied to the General who resided in Rome. They had a Provincial General in almost every part of the world.

Plots were made to **execute prominent leaders who turned to Protestantism**, and it is said that several assassination attempts were made on **Queen Elizabeth I of England**. History shows that the massacre in Paris was nothing compared to the massacres, tortures and poisonings ascribed to the Jesuits. They were expelled from many countries and even banned by Pope Clement V, who shortly after having signed the bull, was poisoned. In 1801 Pope Pius VII restored them. **They are now in command of "The Establishment of the Vatican City" and many other places.**

Active persecution.

The persecutions through the Jesuits were performed in order to extinguish the Protestant faith. The Protestants retaliated but for political reasons, e.g. those who attempted the assassination of Queen Elizabeth I were executed. The Roman Catholic Church tried to excommunicate the Protestants by means of Fire and Sword, just like the Moslems had done to the Christian churches in earlier days.

Today the Jesuits are still active. Being in command of the Vatican City with a worldwide spy-network and with Provincial Generals all over the world, it is easy to store worldwide information in Rome by means of computers in which the life story of a man can be stored in a memory smaller than a matchbox. In this way Rome can become the centre of worldwide persecution (drunk in the blood of the saints) during the reign of the last Roman Emperor – the Antichrist. "He shall cause as many as will not worship the Image of the Beast to be killed", Revelation 13:15.

The Thirty-Year War (1618 – 1648).

A thirty-year civil war broke out in Europe, with almost every country involved, because of friction between the Catholic and the Protestant churches. Finally in **1648** this war ended by **The Peace of Westphalia**. The boundaries between the Catholic and the Protestant states were fixed. The Protestant church was now an established reality. This concluded the time of the Reformation.

The Philadelphia Period – The Mission Church

Lesson 7

THE PHILADELPHIA PERIOD

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| TIME: | From the end of the Thirty-Year War (1648) to the First World War (1914). |
| CHRIST: | The Faithful Witness. |
| EXHORTATION: | Hear what the Spirit says to the churches. |
| PRAISE: | You have kept my Word. |
| PROMISE: | I will keep you from the hour of temptation and make you Pillars in the Temple. |
| CHALLENGE: | Hold on to what you have. |
| REBUKE: | <u>Some</u> are of Satan's Synagogue. |
| WARNING: | The Coming of the Lord. |

A. Introduction

Philadelphia was about fifty kilometres southeast of Sardis. The Lord promised the Missionary church open doors – and the field was open for the true gospel.

Reform means to form again, not a new form, and we shall see that the Reformation was a re-forming again of many truths that were partly lost in the past. The Reformation brought about by Luther, Zwingli and others brought back the truth that we are saved by faith in Christ only and not by good works.

The Philadelphian period (Philadelphia means “brotherly love”) brought back the lost missionary zeal.

B. History of the Philadelphian Period

After the Peace of Westphalia, the Lutheran churches took root, especially in the Northern parts of Europe. Because it was often "**Heads of State**" who allowed the Lutheran churches to settle in their lands, they were in danger of becoming "**National State Churches**". The experience of the Pergamos situation has shown us some unfortunate consequences of that.

After the separation of the Roman and the Protestant churches, the Protestants were divided into three groups:

1. **The Romanizing group** who looked back, seeking friendliness and reunion with Rome. But "No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God", Luke 9:62.
2. **The Anglican group**, satisfied with moderate reforms but without a desire to expand and progress spiritually.
3. **The Radical Protestant group**, going forward in strength and experience. Out of this group came the **Puritans**. They became so strong that Queen Elizabeth I expelled

some of their leaders from England, but the Lord had said, "I have set before you an open door", Revelation 3:8.

In 1688 they were recognised as deserters from the Anglican Church and obtained rights as separate organisations. Out of the Puritans came three churches: **the Presbyterian, the Congregational and the Baptist church.**

C. **The Wesleyan Revival**

In the first half of the eighteenth century the established churches declined. Their services became cold and formal, intellect was ruling and the population sank deeper and deeper into immorality. Then the Lord raised up three great men, the brothers **John and Charles Wesley** and **George Whitefield**. The latter was a great speaker, stirring untold thousands both in England and America. **Charles Wesley** was the sacred **poet**, whose hymns have enriched every collection of gospel hymns since. **John Wesley** was the unquestioned **leader** of the movement. At the age of thirty-five John Wesley, who was an Anglican clergyman, found the reality of faith among the Moravians. He began preaching **the witness of the Spirit** as a personal experience. He formed societies of those who accepted his teachings. He built up his work methodically, with classes, class leaders and later called out lay preachers who carried his doctrines all over Great Britain and America. Because of his methodical system his followers were nicknamed "Methodists". Wesley accepted the name and they were known under the name, "the Wesleyan Methodists", and before his death they numbered thousands. Today, 200 years after his death, the Methodists in America number around 11 million.

The Moravian Mission (1732). The Moravians were a Hussittic Protestant sect formed in Saxony. They had many followers in England and America. They began their mission work by sending **Hans Egede to Greenland** and soon afterwards sent missionaries to North America, the West Indies and the Orient.

William Carey (1761 – 1834) is called **The Father of Modern Missions**. He was a shoemaker who had studied whilst working and had learnt Latin, Hebrew, Greek, French and Dutch. As a teenager he could read his Bible in six languages. At the age of 22 years he joined the Baptist Church and began preaching. In 1792 he preached the memorable sermon, "**Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God**". The same year he helped to organise the English Baptist Missionary Society and a year later went to India as a missionary. Through his efforts the Bible, or parts thereof, have been translated into forty-four languages and in his lifetime approximately 300 million people read it. His grammar books and dictionaries are still in use. He became Professor in oriental languages at the University of Calcutta.

Robert Raikes was born in Gloucester in 1735. He felt a burden for the small children in his town and began helping them by teaching them to read and by giving them New Testaments. The spiritual meetings began and Sunday Schools were formed in many districts and spread over the whole world. He is known as the **Founder of Sunday Schools**. He died in 1811.

Mission societies were formed. Missionaries went throughout the whole world, fulfilling their Master's words, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel".

The Two Streams.

It has been seen that throughout the centuries, there have been two streams in the church. Firstly, the stream that went astray in the area of doctrine and practice. Secondly, there was always a stream, a remnant, which kept the Testimony of Jesus and kept His Word. Often the price was high – **but never too high**. In the previous lessons we have seen where these streams came from, in the following we shall see where these streams go to.

The centuries after the Peace of Westphalia were a church-expanding time, during which the gospel was preached almost all over the world. **Sanctification** came with the Methodists, while the **baptism of believers** came with the Baptists. In the twentieth century we see how the outpouring of **the Holy Spirit** brought about a restoration of the **spiritual gifts** and the **apostolic ministries** through the Pentecostal Movements.

The Philadelphia Period comes to an end and the Laodicean Period begins in 1914, with the beginning of the First World War and the awakening of many old movements and the formation of new movements.

"And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, and then the end will come", Matthew 24:14.

We shall now enter the exciting period of the End Time Church.

The Laodicean Period – The End Time Church

Lesson 8

THE LAODICEAN PERIOD (Revelation 3:14-22)

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| TIME: | From the First World War (1914) to the Millennium. |
| CHRIST: | The Faithful Witness. |
| EXHORTATION: | Hear what the Spirit says to the churches. |
| PRAISE: | None. |
| APOSTASY: | “You think you are rich, but I say you are poor”. |
| JUDGEMENT: | “I will spew you out of my mouth”. |
| PROMISE: | Overcomers shall sit with Him on His throne. I knock and if you open, I will go in. |
| REBUKE: | You are neither cold nor hot. |
| CHALLENGE: | Buy gold of me, tried in fire. Anoint your eyes that you may see. |
| WARNING: | I will spit you out of my mouth. |

A. Introduction

The picture of the **Laodicean Period** is a gloomy one. Was it worth shedding the precious Blood of Jesus, as well as the sacrifice of the lives of thousands of saints, when it all seemingly should end in such a cloud of darkness? We must remember that this is not **The End**, it is only a phase in an eternal process.

From the Word we can see that Jesus expresses His love even to a backslidden church and gives her a final warning, another call, although **He must stand outside the door and knock**. The true church is glorious. Paul says about Christ, "**That He may present unto Himself a glorious church**", Ephesians 5:27.

Once again we meet the two streams: The lukewarm stream that shall be **spewed out of His mouth** and the overcoming stream that shall **sit with Him on His Throne**. To the church in Smyrna He said, "**I know your poverty, but you are rich**". To the church in Laodicea He said, "**You say you are rich, but I say you are miserable, poor, blind and naked**".

God does not look at riches in the same way that we do. He says, "Buy of Me gold – that you may be rich". This means that we should pay the price and receive the true values from Him, and not the values of the world. He wants us to see with anointed eyes, so that we can see things the way He sees them. Before the Philadelphia church the Lord had set an **open door**, but when He comes to the Laodicean Church, He finds a **closed door**. He says, "If anyone opens the door to me I will go in and I will sup with him". **The Bridegroom is asking to go in.**

The Laodicean Period is divided into three sections:

1. From the First World War to the Rapture of the Church.
2. From the Rapture of the Church to the Millennium.

3. The church during the Millennium.

B. From the First World War to the rapture of the Church

Laodicea was an extremely wealthy city. It had a medical school and was noted for healing eye ointment. (The Lord uses pictures known to men to illustrate their spiritual needs.)

One of the sad results of the **Renaissance** was that the **intellectuals** and scholars began to turn to **classics** and became **sceptical** and **critical** of **religion**. This spirit continued into the twentieth century and was called **Higher Criticism of the Scriptures**. Christ was explained as being just a man – His divinity was doubted. The truth about his Virgin Birth was discarded, miracles were simply "happenings", and so forth. We remember these statements from the old controversies in the early church. These attacks affected the nations and influenced the churches. Another calamity was **Liberal Theology**. The church had become **rich, lukewarm and blind**.

The Church in the 20th Century.

As we enter the 20th century we see that the stage for the End Time is being set. **Liberal Theology** tried to take the life out of the Bible and the Christian faith. Many people, especially the young ones, who were exposed to this teaching in the universities, were left empty and without hope. A great deal of superstition was abolished by law and has only been kept alive in paganism and under the guise of Christianity (kept alive in such things as Saint and Mary worship). **Atheism** (believing that there is neither a God nor a Devil) increased; teaching that **man is just a higher kind of animal**. The way was paved for the **Theory of Evolution** (man being just the last link in an evolutionary process, from cell to fish, from fish to frog, from frog to monkey, from monkey to man. See "**The Origin of the Species**" [published in 1859] written by the father of the Theory of Evolution, **Charles Darwin**). Atheism and Liberalism changed the image of Christ into the image of man. The Apostle Paul says about this, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the incorruptible God into an image made like the corruptible man, and birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things", Romans 1:22-23.

Immorality. In Romans 1 we see that because people did not glorify God, He gave them over to immorality. Having lost faith in God they had no moral standards, no conscience and lived after their own carnal desires. The God-given marriage was no longer respected, people turned to free sex, homosexuality and lesbianism. They dishonoured their bodies. This tendency is still increasing, driven by demon forces.

Occultism (the theory of, belief in and practice of evil powers). The Bible calls it **Demon worship**. "When the evil spirit comes and finds the house empty, swept and garnished, then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there", Matthew 12:44-45. This is what happened. Through intellectualism superstition had been abolished in the minds of people. Instead of filling their empty hearts with faith in God, they were filling them with humanism, liberalism and theories of evolution. No wonder that the demons came back and filled the empty vessels with occultism. In many universities students can pursue degrees in occultism called by nice sounding names like **Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) or Parapsychology**. This form of evil worship is one of the features of the End Time.

When the **Antichrist** arrives on the scene, the whole world will be full of **Satan worship**. Hear what John says about this in Revelation 13:8, "... and all that dwell upon earth shall worship the beast". The warning goes out again, "If any man has an ear, let him hear".

The last and final knock on the door. He will give the final knock, which is believed to be the last outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "**And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour my Spirit upon all flesh", Joel 2:28.** God is pouring out His Spirit in great measure today. Many churches, regardless of denomination, open their doors for the Spirit today and are enjoying the great spiritual fellowship whilst waiting for their Bridegroom. Other churches are closing the doors on this blessing. They prefer being joined to a structured organisation that leads to the great apostasy, which the Bible reminds us of. This great knock is the Lord's last outpouring of the Holy Spirit before His return in order to prepare a glorious church for Himself. Jesus said, "I will not leave you Fatherless, I will send the Holy Spirit". And He did so, first on the day of Pentecost as the early rain and now in the end time as the "latter rain".

The First truth revealed to the church was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This and other truths seem to have partly disappeared in the course of history, but Jesus, the First and the Last, did not forget His church. Therefore we believe that the **last truth** before His coming is a new outpouring of His Spirit to strengthen and enlighten His people before the **Sound of the Trumpet** shall be heard. He said, "Buy ointment – that you may see!" Let us then have anointed eyes that we may see and anointed ears that we may hear what the Spirit says.

When did this last outpouring of the Holy Spirit begin?

It began in **Azuza Street, Los Angeles, America in 1906** and spread to England in 1907. One of the great names was the Norwegian Minister, **T.B. Barratt**, who attended a revival meeting in England in 1907, when a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place. Many different shades of Pentecostal churches have appeared since then, for example the various Pentecostal and Apostolic churches and lately the innumerable shades of the Charismatic Movement. In structure they may differ, but in teaching they have in common:

1. They teach Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and as their personal Saviour.
2. Most of them practice baptism of believers by immersion.
3. They believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.
4. They preach the true gospel believing in signs following.
5. They are waiting for the return of the Lord.

The truths of the old times have returned to the church.

The Ecumenical Movement. The Swedish Archbishop, **Nathan Soderblom** is called **The Father of the Ecumenical Movement**. This movement began in Stockholm in 1925 as an organisation called "Life and Work", a movement that was mainly concerned about the social aspect of the church. In 1927 a similar conference was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, called "Faith and Order", which was mainly concerned with doctrinal issues of the church. Nathan Soderblom was the driving force in these councils and arranged for a combined council in Amsterdam in 1948. Here the two councils merged into one, named "**The World Council of Churches**" (W.C.C.). **The aim of the W.C.C.** was to gather all Protestant churches into one great fellowship. All creeds of churches were welcome. There were orthodox churches, such as the Greek Orthodox Church, National State Churches mainly in Europe, as well as

many Pentecostal churches, especially in America.

The W.C.C. leans more towards organisational Oneness than Oneness in Spirit. **The movement is liberal in outlook.** The Roman Catholic Church is not a member, but she has observers at the W.C.C. council meetings. **A mother is watching her daughters coming home.**

The Vatican Council II held in Rome in 1963. It would be wrong to think that a worldwide organisation would not play a part in the final drama of the church. A council was held in Rome in 1963-65 under Pope John 23rd. **The main aim** was to unite the main religions under **One World Church**. Invitations were given to Moslems, Jews, the Greek Orthodox Church and to the **Separate Brethren** as the Protestants are now called.

The attempt was not followed by immediate success, but in later years a certain form of unification has been seen. During the Pope's visit to England, he embraced the Archbishop of Canterbury and later he embraced the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church. In 1986 he visited India and later had a meeting in Assisi in Italy where he shared the platform with a Lama priest. The unification of a **One World Church** under one head is on the way.

The rising again of Islam – Moslems. For centuries the Moslem world has been silent. It would be strange if they did not play a part in the End Time as well. In 1979 we experienced the Islam Revolt in Iran under the leadership of **Ayatollah Khomeini**. The Shah fled the country and his government was overthrown. Today the Moslems are holding a major position in the world because of their vast resources of oil. Today both East and West bow down to the Arabs, ready to sell **Israeli Blood** for **Arab Oil**. Moslem missionaries are flooding the world.

The Revival of the Roman Empire. According to Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, four kingdoms will arise before Christ will set up His Millennial Kingdom in Israel, and Babylon, the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, was the first. Following the line of Daniel's prophecy compared with world history, we find that the four kingdoms have appeared, namely, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Rome would later be divided into two legs. That happened when divisions came between the Roman and Greek empires and churches. In the latter days they would be united into a ten kings' federation. Six European countries in Rome signed **The Treaty of Rome**, and on the 1st of January 1981, Greece joined Rome again as nation No. 10, exactly the number Daniel had prophesied. The number of countries in the E.C. (European Community) has increased since then. The question now is, **whether the E.C. is the Revived Roman Empire?**

In those days a great world ruler, the **Antichrist** will arise and deceive the world, followed by **the Stone Kingdom**, which is **Israel** under the leadership of Christ, who is the King of Kings, the Jewish Messiah and the Saviour of the world.

The Rise of Israel. "In that day will I raise up the Tabernacle of David that is fallen down, I will build again as in the days of old", Amos 9:11.

When Nebuchadnezzar took Judah captive in 606 BC the "**Times of the Gentiles**" began. This is a term used for the time **Jerusalem** should be under foreign rule. **Israel** was under foreign rule more than 2500 years, from **606 BC** until the **15th of May 1948** when the **Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, declared the Independence of the State of**

Israel. This was the beginning of the restoration of Israel. The final restoration will take place when Christ returns as the **Messiah** on the Mount of Olives. "**HIS FEET SHALL STAND AGAIN ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES**", **Zechariah 14:4.**

The **Times of the Gentiles** came to an end when Israel regained control over **Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall in 1967.** Jesus said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down **until the "Times of the Gentiles is fulfilled"**, **Luke 21:24.**

We are all waiting: The **world** is waiting for their **Antichrist** – Israel is waiting for her **Messiah** – the **Christians** are waiting for their **Saviour.**

What has all the above information to do with Church History? Very much! When the disciples asked Jesus about when the End would be (Matthew 24:3) Jesus replied by pointing to the Signs of the Times. He said, "**When you see these things happen, know that the end is near**", **Matthew 24:33.**

C. From the rapture of the Church to the Millennium

The rapture of the Church described in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 corresponds to Revelation 4:1-5, where John is taken up into heaven. Here he sees the **Crowned Elders** representing the raptured Church. The Lord keeps His word, "To him that overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me on My Throne", Revelation 3:21.

They had arrived; they had been crowned. According to the Prophet Daniel there will be a gap of seven years until we come to Revelation 19:7-9, where the **Marriage of the Lamb** takes place – the Christian hope of unification with Christ – and the Church becomes the Bride of Christ. This gap of seven years (from Revelation 4:1 to 19:7-9) when the church will be in heaven corresponds to the seven years of Tribulation on earth under the rulership of the Antichrist.

Revelation 19:11-16 describes the **honeymoon trip** of the church back to Earth, to the **Mount of Olives**, from where Jesus ascended 2000 years ago, leaving a humble little flock of disciples to cope with a world-wide mission.

Those who are left behind.

The true church will have left the earth, and the **apostate church**, the Great Harlot with her children and allies, will move into the time of the **Great Tribulation.** She will join forces with the World Leader, the Beast, who is the Antichrist and with the False Prophet. These together, the Antichrist and the False Prophet and the Great Harlot will cause worldwide persecution of unprepared Christians who missed the rapture, but repented during the time of Tribulation. "I saw under the altar them that were slain for the Word of God", Revelation 6:9. "Those who will not worship the Image of the Beast, must be killed. Here is the patience of the saints", Revelation 14:12-13.

HOW CAN THERE BE CHRISTIANS ON EARTH WHEN THE CHURCH HAS BEEN RAPTURED? The following opportunities are given to those who are left behind:

- 1. Many who were not ready** at the Rapture, might repent.
- 2. The Jews who "were set aside for a time"** on the day when Jesus cursed Jerusalem,

were replaced by the church to bring the gospel to the world. When the church has been raptured, God turns again to the Jews, right after the rapture of the church, and seals 144,000 people of the tribes of Israel to preach the gospel during the time of the Tribulation. Revelation 7. By their testimonies multitudes will be saved. Refusing to worship Antichrist they will be murdered and found beneath the altar. "Where did they come from?" an elder asked. Revelation 7:13. "They came out of the Great Tribulation" was the answer. Revelation 7:14. **It is noteworthy to see that** while the "raptured saints" are sitting upon the throne, having crowns, the "tribulation saints", who missed the rapture stand before the throne with palms in their hands. Revelation 7:9.

3. **There are the two witnesses** who shall preach for three and a half years during the Tribulation period. If there were no possibility for salvation after the rapture, what would be the point of having them preach?
4. **An angel shall fly in the sky** preaching the **Everlasting Gospel** to them that "dwell upon earth". Surely there is no more place left on earth for a witness. Jesus warned, "The night shall come when no man can work". A final word is given to the survivors, "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord from henceforth", **and heaven becomes silent** until all the judgements mentioned in the book of Revelation have been passed on earth.

Those who dwell on earth. Terrible judgements are to be passed upon earth, but we shall mention only the one which is related to the church, namely:

The Judgement of The Harlot. The Antichrist and his ten-king-federation shall hate the harlot. Revelation 17:16. Just as the emperors of old always wanted to throw off the papal rule, so it shall be at this time. The ten horns under the leadership of the Beast (the Roman Emperor) will decide to burn Rome, just as emperor Nero did.

The Bride's triumph. "**Rejoice for God has avenged you on her**". **Revelation 18:20-24.** It seems that the **Marriage of the Lamb** will take place in heaven at about the same time as the Harlot is destroyed on earth, because right after follows the Battle of Armageddon, when all nations together shall go and fight against Israel. Anti-Semitic tendencies are already in force. Then the Lord, riding on a white horse and followed by His saints also riding on white horses, shall come down to crush the armies and the power of the Antichrist with the breath of His mouth. Christ will set up His millennial Kingdom, Israel will become the Head of the Nations (she has long enough been the tail). "And you shall be the head, not the tail", Deuteronomy 28:13. Then the **Times of the Gentiles** will be over for good.

D. The Church during the Millennium

The church shall reign with Christ for a thousand years. "And I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God and who had not worshipped the Beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their forehead or on their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years", Revelation 20:4.

E. The Church in eternity

The eternal state of the church is described in Revelation chapters 21-22. "The New Jerusalem is the home of the glorified church, the place which Jesus went to prepare for us. This magnificent city, which had been foreseen by Abraham and some of the prophets, had been kept in heaven during the time of the Millennium as a dwelling place for the Bride, while she, like Christ, with heavenly bodies, had a superior rule over Israel and the nations during the Millennium. Now the old heaven and the earth have passed away and the New Jerusalem is the new capital of the new Earth".

"Eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him", 1 Corinthians 2:9.