

SEVEN STAGES OF CHURCH HISTORY

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS TRUE LINE

The first period in Church history can simply be characterized by the phrase **fully purposed**. These Christians (Acts 11:26) were for the most part doctrinally sound. They received the Word of God in its original form, as well as the canonization of Scripture by the middle of the 2nd Century A.D. (1 Thessalonians 2:13) And they fully realized that this latter portion of the **preservation** process had been accomplished without the presence of any **original** manuscripts. In short, these Believers had been entrusted with the entire collection of books (**Biblos**) that others would eventually receive in the centuries yet to come.

The next period saw the development of two main schools of biblical thought. **Antioch** had become the model church for sound doctrine and world missions. (Acts 13:1-3 records that Paul and Barnabus were sent out from here 100 years earlier to preach the gospel to the uttermost part of the world.) **Alexandria**, Egypt on the other hand, had become the model for false doctrine and heresy! (One should note the contrast of these two cities in Acts 6:3-13, when they are mentioned in the Bible for the first time.) Believers throughout Asia Minor experienced severe **persecution** (Revelation 2:10) with several million saints being martyred from the time of Nero's reign to that of Diocletian. As the crushing of myrrh brings forth a sweet smelling aroma, so likewise did the crushing of these saints. (Ephesians 5:2)

In the third era of Church history a problem was exposed that would plague Christianity for centuries to come. Due to the influence of the Alexandrian school of thought, doctrinal compromise began to take root in the Church. The system of beliefs stemming from Antioch clashed with the teachings of Alexandria. The controversy became so great that the Roman Emperor **Constantine** ordered a council of all the churches to be held at **Nicaea** in 325 A.D. for the purpose of settling the major issues. Afterwards, Constantine began to force Christianity upon his subjects, although he himself was not truly born again. It was becoming more evident that Satan's new **seat** of authority was now located in the city of Rome. (Revelation 2:13; 17:18)

The fourth and fifth periods of Church history covered the 1,000 year period known by historians as the **Dark Ages**. Bible-believing saints experienced severe persecution as they began to speak out against the Roman **Catholic** system which by now was taking over Europe. The focus of the attack was against the Bible these saints had. (The Greek **Byzantine** text was primarily used during this time.) Because this Bible was so different in her eyes, she saw the necessity to destroy it. Rome had developed a warped doctrinal view of herself as having taken over the Old Testament promises that had been given to Israel. (Revelation 2:9; 3:9) She thought she would reign in a militant fashion for 1,000 years, thus preparing the way for the Lord's return. As the Catholic Church gained power politically, the persecution of **heretics** increased to the point of martyrdom. (Revelation 17:6) These **Red Ones** were people willing to pay the price for what they believed about their Bible with their own blood. (Revelation 6:9; 20:4) Examples of anti-Roman Catholic movements from this period include the Albigenses, Bogomils, Waldenses, Paulicians, Brethern, and Moravians.

Probably the greatest hour of Christianity occurred during the sixth era of Church history. With the completion of Erasmus' Greek text, which later became known as the **Received Text**, it became easier for men to gain access to God's truth. And once the lights came on, many inside the Catholic Church began to see her for what she truly was, and made the decision to leave. (Revelation 18:4) This **Reformation** spread throughout the entirety of Europe and could not be stopped. And because these saints made an effort to keep God's Word, the Lord set before them an **open door** to take the gospel to the world. (Revelation 3:7-8)

The seventh period of Church history came about as a result of bad stewardship on the part of God's people. (1 Corinthians 4:1-2) In spite of seeing three or four centuries of God's blessings upon one Book, men somehow forgot the past. They forgot that God's Word had been **purified** seven times through seven English translations. (Tyndale – 1534, Coverdale – 1535, Matthew – 1537, Great Bible – 1539, Geneva Bible – 1560, Bishops' Bible – 1568, King James – 1611) And they had forgotten that Erasmus' Greek text had been previously purified several times as well. No English version of the Bible had been translated for nearly 300 years, but few ever stopped to ask why. The result of this ignorance was devastating to say the least! It would seem that the only thing men never learn from history, is the fact that men never learn from history!

THE SAINTS

FIRST COMING

32 A.D.

EPHESUS

FULLY
PURPOSED

150 A.D.

SMYRNA

BITTERNESS
AND
DEATH

325 A.D.

PERGAMOS

MUCH
MARRIAGE

500 A.D.

THYATIRA

ODOR OF
AFFLICTION

1000 A.D.

SARDIS

RED ONES

1500 A.D.

PHILADELPHIA

BROTHERLY
LOVE

1900 A.D.

LAODICEA

JUSTICE
OF
THE
PEOPLE

SECOND COMING

PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION OF GOD'S WORD

The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

PSALM 12:6-7

THE DEVIL AND HIS COUNTERFEIT LINE

"Yea, hath God said?" The Devil's first recorded words in Genesis 3:1-3 were powerful enough that they caused an individual to put into question the very words of God. And because of that sin, life on this planet would never be the same. This is why Paul warned the 1st Century Believers that they too were in danger of a similar type of deception. (2 Corinthians 11:1-4) But that is exactly what happened, because they let down their guard and eventually left their **first love** for God's Word. (Revelation 2:4) And as a result of that sin, life within the Church would never be the same.

While Believers were busy being persecuted for their faith, other professing Christians were busy critiquing God's Word. In 180 A.D., a man by the name of Pantaenus established a school in Alexandria, Egypt to do just that. The school continued after his death, and a few years later a man came along named **Origen** who assumed the leadership role from 203-231 A.D. Origen (known as the father of **critical investigation**) was influenced by a Jewish philosopher named **Philo** (Colossians 2:8) who was well versed in the teachings of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. The school of Alexandria took shape under Origen and adhered to his **Gnostic** system of teaching and reasoning. And when Scripture did not agree with Alexandrian doctrine, the text was conveniently altered or omitted.

Not only were false doctrines making their way into the Church during this period, but many worldly traditions were beginning to creep in as well. Because people were often **evangelized** with the edge of a sword, the Church became poisoned with numerous pagan practices from other religions. The celebration of **Christmas** and **Easter** as special holy days, and the worship of Mary as the **Mother of God** were results of the Church's illicit relationship with the world. (Revelation 2:14, 20-22; 17:1-5) And it was also during this time that Constantine ordered 50 copies of the New Testament to be written on vellum scrolls by the hand of another Alexandrian man named **Eusebius**.

The most valuable weapon at Rome's disposal was that of keeping the people in their ignorance. This practice of **conquering the laity** (referred to as the doctrine of the Nicolaitans in Revelation 2:15) was an intentional strategy of the priesthood designed to create fear in the hearts of men as well. The clergy also began to use Latin more frequently, though few people understood it, as **Jerome's Latin Vulgate** (a 5th Century translation of the corrupt Alexandrian Text) became the acceptable standard for Rome. The teaching of the **Transubstantiation** of Christ in the Catholic **Mass** (referred to as the doctrine of Balaam in Revelation 2:14) was eventually done entirely in the dead Latin language. The doctrine of **Apostolic Succession** (which God called a lie in Revelation 2:2) greatly aided the priesthood's ability to retain its control over the people through the **confessional** while they were alive. However, it was the doctrine of **purgatory**, along with the selling of **indulgences**, which allowed this same group of men to control the fate of the people even after they had died!

In 1582 the Catholic Church had no choice but to make the **Douay Rheims** Bible her official English translation. More key teachings were made official during this time period as well, including the doctrine of **baptismal regeneration**. Those who taught otherwise were branded as heretics, and spitefully given the distinction of being **Ana Baptists** by the Catholic **Council of Trent**. And the forbiddance of clergy marriage, along with the commandment to abstain from the eating of meat during Lente, only served to further reveal who was really controlling this church. (1 Timothy 4:1-3)

With the persecution of Believers becoming more a thing of the past, some professing Christians set out to **revise** God's Word. And by the mid 1800s, a committee influenced by two men's studies (Doctors Westcott and Hort) accomplished just that. The translation of the Revised Version of the Bible in 1884 was based primarily on two key manuscripts – Codex **Vaticanus** and Codex **Sinaiticus**. Most scholars believed that these very **ancient** texts were two of the original New Testament copies written out by Eusebius nearly 1,500 years before. And since they were older and more complete than anything else around, they thought they had to be more **reliable** as well. But the text that men had died for during all those years of persecution was now simply a forgotten thing of the past!

THE AINTS

REVELATION 2:1-3:22

*ish
ine
the
rgy
to*