

Checkin' Out My Walk  
#13 - Thyatira - Dark Ages - Part I - 590 - 800 AD

The church was born on the Day of Pentecost, ten days after the Lord Jesus ascended to God the Father in heaven (Acts 1-2). For close to two thousand years since its birth, the church has been in the process of being built. Church history is the record of the construction. It is an important record because it reveals what happens when the church is led in the right direction and the disastrous results when it is led astray.

The Church of Thyatira is a clear example of the results when believers or churches are led astray and accept or tolerate a false system of worship. Just as the rule of Queen Jezebel was the worst period in Old Testament history, the church of Thyatira is condemned because they allow and tolerate the "spirit of Jezebel." This results in the church and society being plunged into the "Dark Ages" which lasted for almost 1000 years from 590 to 1517 AD.

Question: What led to the church's corruption and spiritual darkness which lasted almost 10 centuries? When Constantine became Emperor of the Roman Empire in 313 AD, paganism was "baptized" and Satan joined the church. Pagan practices and idol worship began their poison corruption of the church. During this period, the church of Pergamos compromised and accepted the teachings of the Doctrine of Balaam. This led to accepting the Doctrine of the Nicolaitans which Jesus hated. Stumbling blocks, snares and traps were being laid to entice God's people to sin against Him and incur His anger. A religious "elite" clergy was developed who lorded over the people. A doctrine of a "license to sin" was being proclaimed. The corruption deepens due to the apathy of the church. Where were the believers to stand for truth? Jesus' condemnation to the church of Thyatira: Because you allow and tolerate.

What had been a "synagogue of Satan" in the church of Smyrna became the "seat of Satan" in Pergamos. As we enter the years of the Dark Ages, the church of Thyatira will plunge into the "depths of Satan."

Philip Mauro remarks, "Our view is that in this letter to Thyatira we are given to see the inception of that masterpiece of satanic deception, that monstrous heresy, whose fullest development has been manifested in Romanism."

Seiss says: "Then came the Thyatiran period- the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness for truth. The age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the Church usurped the place of Christ, and the witnesses of Jesus were given to dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of the false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation."

The Roman Catholic Church, the Christian religion of the time, dominated the western world and controlled religion, philosophy, morals, politics, art and education.

During this time, the Roman Catholic Church nearly strangled the life out of Christ's true church. No one was allowed to read or be educated except the priests of the Roman Church. Papal authority ruled over the church. The Church became a political institution and gave itself a power greater than that of the kings. Christianity was plunged into an unprecedented spiritual darkness. The traditions of men took the place of the truth of God. The Pope's decrees replaced the doctrine of God. The Canon Law, law of the church, had its own courts. If you disobeyed the Canon Law, you could be excommunicated. Thus you cannot receive the sacraments (baptism, eucharist, confirmation, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders, matrimony). The purpose of the sacraments is to make people holy, to build up the body of Christ and give worship to God. If you don't receive these, you will go to hell; you cannot receive a Christian burial; you will be rejected by other Christians. An Interdict was the excommunication of an entire town or region due to a noble or king violating Canon Law. Sacraments were substituted for salvation. Rituals were replacing redemption. The vital doctrines of Biblical Christianity had almost disappeared.

All were required to bow to the pope, "venerate" (worship, revere) Mary and the saints, cherish the icons of the church, and express unconditional faith in all of the doctrines of the church, regardless of how unscriptural or antithetical to the true practice of New Testament Christianity they may be. The Scriptures were deemed to be the *possession* of the church and were to be "handled" only by the bishops and priests (the Nicolaitans). Dissenters were dealt with quickly and brutally. Anyone found with so much as a single page of Scripture in their possession stood in peril of torture or death. The Scriptures were not to be preserved, but destroyed and burned.

The progression of apostasy (fall away from that for which you once stood) from Pergamos to Thyatira is obvious. In the church of Pergamos, the apostasy was symbolized by Balaam, a prophet whose bad influence came only from the outside. But in the church of Thyatira, the apostasy is now symbolized by Jezebel, a queen governing from the inside, leading the people to commit evil. The stage had been set for the complete development of the papal system which dominated western civilization for almost 950 years, from 590 to 1517.

Joseph A. Seiss says of spiritual Jezebel: "And in all history there is not another character which so completely represents the Papal system-its character, works and worship as the unclean wife of Ahab. She was a heathen, married to a Jew; and such is the character of the Papal system in its main elements-Paganism joined to an obsolete Judaism. She is described as calling herself a prophetess, and as undertaking to be the teacher of God's servants; and Popery claims and professes to be heaven's only infallible teacher of God's truth. She was a persecutor and murderess of God's prophets and witnesses; and the Papacy is marked by nothing more than its severity towards such as stood out against its impious pretenses, and its public and secret tortures and butcheries of the saints." (pp. 194, 195)

Attributes of Jezebel to look for: devoted to luxury, lascivious, malicious, unjust, evil, shameless, ambitious, proud, persuasive, revengeful, cruel, wicked, lead astray, false system of worship, massacre God's people, malice, corrupt, schemer, slander, covetousness, etc.

In 395 AD, the Roman Empire divided into east and west. The eastern empire, headquartered in Constantinople lasted until 1453 when it was conquered by the Turks. The western empire, headquartered in Rome, fell in 476 AD when Germanic tribes (barbarians) conquered the city of Rome. After the fall of Rome, no single state or government united the people who lived on the European continent.

There are no distinct countries and many different groups were vying for power. Instead, the Catholic Church became the most powerful institution of the medieval period. Kings, queens and other leaders derived much of their power from their alliances with and protection of the Church. The only accepted Christian religion was the Catholic religion.

*Rome's Theology Before The Reformation -  
Entrenchment of The Roman Catholic Church -Latin-Teutonic Church 590-800 AD*

I. Infallibility of the Pope

A. In A.D. 590, the pope was formally recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, as Jesus Christ's co-ruler on earth. The pope said, "I am the judge of all, I am judged by none." Why was this done? Remember, the Romans were caught up in emperor worship. The Catholic Church said, you want to worship a man, we'll give you one!

B. As early as 590 AD, Gregory the Great called himself "the servant of servants," believing he was supreme among all bishops. Gregory believed in the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church. There was no salvation outside of this religious organization. Church tradition equals the authority of the Bible.

Heresy Introduced: (1) He transformed the bishopric of Rome into a papal system.

(2) He formalized ritual and placed great emphasis upon the altar and a re-sacrificing (transubstantiation) of Christ in the mass. (3) He pushed the concept of purgatory.

(4) He gave impetus to the worshipping of saints and martyrs.

(5) In blatant disregard to the Word of God, he enforced celibacy of the clergy and said the priest wear long, flowing robes. This is a continuation of the practices of the pagan Roman priests, as well as the occult. He enforced monastic discipline whenever he could.

Monasticism gave great impetus to the papal system. Literally multiplied thousands of men went into these monkish orders, giving real numerical as well as spiritual strength to the Roman Catholic Church.

Missionary Activity Pope Gregory the Great sent Roman missionaries to southern England to convert the Anglo-Saxons to the Roman brand of Christianity. The Celtic Christians oppose this intrusion so strongly the Anglo-Saxon king convenes a meeting in 664 A.D. to decide which brand of Christianity will be the sole one allowed in England. He chooses Rome because it claims to have the keys to heaven. Other areas convert to Roman Catholicism: the Visigoths in Spain in 589 A.D., Belgium and Holland, the Lombards of southern Italy by 675 A.D., and most of Germany by 718 A.D.

### Mohammed's Influence in Early Middle Ages

The inhabitants of Arabia were descendants of Ishmael, son of Abraham and half-brother of Isaac. They were heathen, worshiping idols and believing in many gods. In 570 at Mecca, a boy named Mohammed was born. He would meditate and pray much, fall into trances and claim to hear the voice of Allah. Mohammed was impressed with the idea of the monotheism of Jews and Christians, but was terribly unimpressed with their lives. In fact, he called the Christians, "bone worshipers." The Koran is the sacred book of Islam, and is supposed to contain the divine revelation made to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel. *Teachings of Mohammed (5 Pillars of Faith)*: (1) Their creed is "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet"; (2) prayer five times a day toward Mecca; (3) making a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during one's lifetime; (4) giving alms for pious and charitable purposes; (5) fasting from sunrise to sunset throughout the sacred month of Ramadan; and (6) the sword in holy war is a means of spreading the Islam religion.

The Rise of Mohammedanism: In 622, Mohammed was forced to flee Mecca because the population was not ready to accept his teachings. He fled to Medina and there his teachings were warmly received. With the help of his converts, in ten years time he made himself master of Arabia. By 711 the Islam religion had conquered Persia, penetrated into India and China, and overrun Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa. It had conquered Spain, and was threatening to move into all of Europe. At its height, the medieval Islamic world was more than three times bigger than all of Christendom. This meant the end of Christian culture in the west. The Muslims were never able to take the Byzantine Empire, but they certainly took much of the territory of this empire. Constantinople, while attacked and under siege numbers of times by the Muslims, did not fall until 1453 when it was conquered by the Turks.

A positive, fanatical monotheism which promised positions of leadership and booty to those who would engage in world conquest was an incentive in obtaining followers. Also those that die by the sword for Allah are guaranteed heaven.

The Effects of Mohammedanism on the Church: The church was weakened spiritually and territorially from 632 to 732 because of the Muslims. Why this crushing defeat to the church? Was this a judgment from God? Christians in the eastern section of the church had failed to evangelize — they were salt without savor. Thus, this destruction of the ancient and illustrious church east and south of the Mediterranean was a removing of its lampstand. (Rev 2:5) The church in Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria suffered terribly under the Muslims. In Syria alone, 10,000 churches were destroyed or became mosques. The church of North Africa, with its memories of Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine, was practically obliterated. Only small Christian communities survived here and there.

The Impact of Islam The organized church loses Palestine, Asia Minor, Egypt, and North Africa to Islam. The eastern segment of the church changes to reach Muslims for Christianity. The Roman bishop becomes more powerful because some of his rivals in the East come under Muslim domination or lose much of their domains.

Charles Martel - Charles The Hammer - Frankish King who defeats the Muslims at the Battle Of Tours in 732 AD. He had 20-30,000 troops; Muslims had 80,000. He is determined Europe will be Christian and not Muslim. This battle was the decisive turning point in the struggle against Islam, a struggle which preserved Christianity as the religion of Europe when Muslim rule was overrunning the remains of the old Roman and Persian Empires. How might history have been different if he had lost the battle?

Revival of Western Imperialism A German prince named Charlemagne was determined to unite the different kingdoms of Europe. He was famous for his athleticism and intelligence although like most leaders, he was illiterate. He slept with a book under his pillow in the hope of absorbing the ability to read. Starting in 774 he embarked on over 50 military campaigns. Charlemagne amassed the most territory ruled by one man in Western Europe since the fall of Roman in 476 AD. In 779 Pope Leo III was driven out of Rome by a mob angered by his common birth and accused him of adultery and perjury. Charlemagne sent an army to protect the Pope. On Christmas Day, 800 A.D., the Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne "emperor of the Romans," the first emperor of Rome in over 300 years. This act revives imperialism in the West, gives birth to the idea that political rulers must receive their crowns from the pope, obligates political rulers to aid the pope when in trouble. It instigates the following new philosophy in Europe: The Kingdom of God has two arms—the spiritual, with the pope over human souls, and the political, with the emperor over human physical life. Thus the pope and emperor are to give each other mutual support. This philosophy sets the stage for conflict between popes and emperors for the rest of the Middle Ages. Over time, Charlemagne's realm became the Holy Roman Empire, one of several political entities in Europe whose interests tended to align with those of the Church.

## II. Salvation in the Roman Catholic Church Only

Rome taught: All who did not acknowledge (1) the pope as God's representative on earth and (2) the Roman Catholic Church as the only true church were damned.

Salvation was confined within the teachings of the Roman Church. Every person who disagreed with the Roman Church was in line for a heresy trial and perhaps excommunication which meant the loss of one's soul.

III. Salvation by Works Salvation was not caused by God's grace through a supernatural new birth, but by assent to Roman Catholic dogma and practice. Faith was not trust in Christ for salvation, but submission to the church. Conclusion: Salvation was not by grace through faith in Christ alone, but by faith in the church and good works prescribed by the church.

Note: "Good works" consisted of mere external obedience to the church, and did not necessarily flow from a life of faith in Christ. The Roman Catholic Church stressed external actions, legal observance and penitential works. Man actually gained heaven by his works.

System of Penance. From a "works" theology flowed the idea of penance > Do certain external acts to prove the reality of their faith. At first penance consisted of certain public expressions of repentance for people involved in scandal, but it was soon extended to every sin, even to the most secret. Penance was considered as sort of a punishment to which it was necessary to submit in order to obtain the forgiveness of God through the priest's absolution.

"Great importance was soon attached to external marks of repentance --to tears, fasting, and mortification of the flesh. Inward regeneration of the heart, which alone constitutes a real conversion, was forgotten.

"As confession and penance are easier than the extirpation of sin and the abandonment of vice, many ceased contending against the lusts of the flesh, and preferred gratifying them at the expense of a few mortifications.

"The penitential works, thus substituted for the salvation of God, were multiplied in the Church from Tertullian down to the thirteenth century. Men were required to fast, to go barefoot, to wear no linen, etc.; or to renounce the world and embrace a monastic life.

"In the eleventh century voluntary flagellations were added to these practices. Nobles and peasants, old and young, even children of five years of age, whose only covering was a cloth tied round the middle, went in pairs, by hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands, through the towns and villages, visiting the churches in the depth of winter. Armed with scourges, they flogged each other without pity, and the streets resounded with cries and groans that drew tears from all who heard them" (D'aubigne).

IV. Complete Sanctification Rome taught sinless perfectionism. God was said to infuse grace and transform the sinful nature. "Rome held out to men the possibility of becoming pure and sinless saints (ontological perfection). Those who attained this perfection reached sainthood and were qualified to enter heaven at the hour of death. Those who did not become perfect and absolutely sinless in the flesh would need to go to purgatory after death and thus be made completely just and qualified to enter heaven" ("The Great Issues of the Reformation," *Present Truth*).

V. Worshipping of Saints The more a person practiced external works, the more saintlike he became and the closer he came to heaven. Some men, who were good enough to be called saints, lived lives advanced in holiness beyond what was required of them. Many were worshiped by the Roman Catholic Church and became mediators between God and man. "Prayers were made to them; their aid was invoked in all the sorrows of life; and a real idolatry thus supplanted the adoration of the living and true God" (J. H. Merle D'aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 1848).

VI. Exaltation of the Clergy The doctrine of sinless perfectionism strengthened the position of the Roman hierarchy. The clergy, thought to be more holy than the average people, were special channels of the grace of God. Thus, the clergy had the authority from God to dispense God's grace.

System of Indulgences: A system of exchange whereby the priests employed their special rapport with God to perform certain religious acts for laymen. For a price, Clergy would pray, fast and read scripture for a person. This developed into buying up time one might have to spend in purgatory.

"Salvation, taken from the hands of God, fell into those of the priests, who set themselves in the place of our Lord. Souls thirsting for pardon were no more to look to heaven, but to the Church, and above all to its pretended head. To these blinded souls the Roman pontiff was God. Hence the greatness of the popes - hence unutterable abuses." (D'aubigne)