

# THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation  
to New Creation



## fifteen ► The Clash of the Kingdoms



'The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer' painted by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) and held by the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. The scene is ancient Rome's racecourse, the Circus Maximus, but the seating resembles that of the Colosseum, Rome's amphitheatre, in which gladiatorial combats and other spectacles were held. The victims huddled in prayer are about to suffer martyrdom by wild beasts. Others are being set ablaze. Christians in the Roman Empire were persecuted at times – and such persecution could occasionally be brutal. The Roman historian Tacitus (AD 56–117) writes of an infamous outbreak of persecution under the Emperor Nero, following a fire in Rome, for which he made Christians the scapegoats. He writes: "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people. . . ." These horrific scenes were probably in the artist's mind as he painted this scene – but resetting the scene in the Circus Maximus and replacing the dogs with wild beasts. But the capital punishment in Rome known as 'damnatio ad bestias' ('condemnation to beasts'), involved various animals, including lions. So it's quite likely that some Christians were indeed executed using lions or other wild beasts.

## Cosmic conflict

On the Cross Jesus disabled, disarmed and bound Satan. But Satan continues a fierce rearguard action against God and His people. And he is still trying to build a global world order in rebellion against God.

In this session, we'll first review the Church's conflict with Satan and the forces of darkness. We'll follow Satan's attempt to establish a godless world order on Earth – a false 'paradise' under his domination. His last-ditch attempt to do this centres on the Antichrist – we'll look at what the Bible tells us about this enigmatic figure. We also look at what the Book of Revelation tells us about Satan's kingdom – the Dragon and the two fearsome beasts, and "*Babylon the great*".

Finally, we'll trace the story of the Church from apostolic times to the present day. For two millennia, God's people have been under Satanic attack: persecuted, torn apart by

division and beset by heresy and corruption. But there have always been those who have remained true to God. And we are now living in an unprecedented time in the history of the Church. God's Kingdom is advancing powerfully across the globe!

### The battleground

God's creation is a battleground. War rages in heavenly places and here on Earth.

Satan gained a foothold on Earth through Adam's sin. Mankind came under the domination of Satan (see 1 John 5.19). He is "*the ruler of this world*" (John 12.31, 14.30, 16.11), "*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*" (Ephesians 2.2). Human society – all the civilisations and kingdoms of the world through all history - came under Satanic control.

But ever since mankind's Fall, God has been foiling Satan's efforts and establishing His Kingdom on Earth. The key moment in this battle was the Cross. There Jesus overcame Satan and every power under his command. Jesus crushed the Serpent's head (see Genesis 3.15). When He rose again and ascended into Heaven, His Father enthroned Him at His right hand, and gave Him a Name above every other name (Philippians 2.9). Jesus now sits on David's throne (Acts 2.30, which recalls Psalm 132.11; see also 2 Samuel 7.12-13,16, Psalm 89.3-4,35-37). He reigns over Heaven and Earth (Matthew 28.18, Ephesians 1.20-22).

## Our accuser overthrown



'St Michael Archangel' painted by Guido Reni (1575-1642) and displayed in the church of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini in Rome. The artist depicts Michael, clad partly as a Roman soldier, in Andrew Graham-Dixon's words, "effortlessly victorious over a grotesquely grimacing Satan". In the Book of Revelation, Christ's triumph over Satan through His death and resurrection is depicted as a battle between God's angelic forces headed up by the archangel Michael (who act as Christ's agents) and Satan and his angels (Revelation 12.7-10). And Christ's triumph on the Cross is the basis for our victory over Satan. "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." (Revelation 12.11). We, God's new humanity, now share Christ's dominion over evil powers.

On the Cross Jesus disabled, disarmed and bound Satan. To understand exactly how He did this, we need to recall how Satan gained power over mankind in the first place.

As we saw in Session 4, Satan is the great accuser - he's the cosmic counsel for the prosecution. From the day Adam and Eve first sinned, Satan has appeared before God and accused every person of unrighteousness. And he is right – "all have sinned" (Romans 3.23). In the heavenly courtroom Satan demanded that God execute His justice against us. His case was watertight; mankind was indeed guilty. God executed justice – and the punishment fitted the

crime. Adam and Eve gave their allegiance to Satan. They obeyed his word. So God gave them up to be in allegiance to Satan. They were condemned to be subjects in his dark kingdom, and all the consequences which that brings – alienation from God and all His blessings, and to share in Satan's final doom (Matthew 25.41, Revelation 20.10,15).

On the Cross, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. All of us who truly believe in Jesus are **justified** (for example, Romans 3.24,28). As we've seen, this word is a legal term. Jesus has paid our penalty in full and His perfect righteousness is credited to our account. God declares us not guilty. We are now reconciled to God, in right relationship with Him.

That breaks Satan's power over us! He no longer has any legal case against God's people. He can accuse us all he wants, but we're not guilty - "*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8.1, NIV). By the Cross, God has "*delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*" (Colossians 1.13).

In Revelation 12.9-10, John sees Satan and his evil angels being hurled down to the Earth. John tells us: "*For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down*" (Revelation 12.10 NIV). That probably doesn't mean that Satan physically fell to Earth. It more likely pictures Jesus's victory over Satan through His death and resurrection. God's blood-bought people are victorious over Satan (see Revelation 12.11).

Satan can't touch us - snarl and roar as he may (James 4.7, see 1 Peter 5.8-9, and compare 1 John 5.4-5). And he's powerless to stop the good news of this victory being preached to every tribe and nation. He can't prevent Jesus's Great Commission from being fulfilled.



### Foot Note The two kingdoms

God's Kingdom is, in simple terms, where His will is done (see Matthew 6.10). It's His new world-order where He is Lord, where He is worshipped, honoured and obeyed. Satan has his kingdom, his 'world-order', too, where he is worshipped and obeyed - the Bible calls it "*this world*" (see, for example, John 12.31). It's these two kingdoms that are at war.

## The final push to victory

Satan's power over this world is broken. The Man Christ Jesus is Lord over all creation (Ephesians 1.20-22). But Satan is still "*the god of this world*" (2 Corinthians 4.4). Going back to our passage in Revelation, we find that even though Satan is hurled down to the Earth, he still makes war against God's people (Revelation 12.9-10,13-17). How do we explain this?

One key reason is surely this. God appointed mankind to rule Earth on His behalf. Mankind was to make it productive and beautiful, and develop a rich and godly civilisation in it. They were to extend paradise across the globe. God wanted to accomplish His wonderful goal for Earth through *mankind*.

The first humans failed, of course. Humanity came under Satan's domination. Satan's dark kingdom seized a



bridgehead on earth. Satan began to create a world-order on earth in opposition to God – he became the ruler of this world.

But God has never revoked humanity's mandate to bring paradise to Earth. So it was through a human, the Incarnate Son of God, that God struck the mortal blow against Satan. A human being - the Man Christ Jesus - now sits enthroned at God's right hand. As the Divine Son, Jesus has always ruled creation. But now He rules as Man, too. A member of the human race now exercises the dominion over Earth that God originally entrusted to mankind. A Man is now vanquishing all mankind's enemies (1 Corinthians 15.25, Hebrews 10.12-13; both passages allude to Psalm 110.1).

And God has given Jesus's brothers and sisters - His new humanity, the Church - a vital role in pressing His victory to its final conclusion. That's why we're still at war with Satan. Jesus has enlisted us to join Him in His final 'push' to victory over the forces of darkness. Our current period of history - between the Day of Pentecost and Jesus's Second Coming - is the "*last days*" (Hebrews 1.2). Satan's world-order is in retreat. Through His Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered people, God is advancing His Kingdom across the globe, plundering Satan's domain and making disciples in every nation on Earth (see Matthew 28.19-20). And while the conflict rages, God's Church – His new humanity – is being built up and is growing to maturity.

Our battle will continue till Jesus comes again – and will doubtless grow fiercer as His coming draws near. But victory is assured. We're already seated with Him there in heavenly places (see Ephesians 2.6). We share His triumph over Satan and his kingdom (see, for example, James 4.7, 1 John 5.4). The Church appears - by worldly standards - small and weak in the midst of powerful godless civilisations that seem at times poised to extinguish it. Yet the Church, in Paul Billheimer's words: "*Through the use of her weapons of prayer and faith, . . . holds in this present moment the balance of power in world affairs*".

On D-Day - 6th June 1944 - Allied forces landed on the Normandy beaches and began their great final advance towards Germany and victory over the Nazi war-machine.

The Allies possessed overwhelming superiority in men and weapons. From D-Day onwards, the final outcome of World



A historic photograph of D-Day by Robert F. Sargent, CPhoM, USCG. Landing craft from the USS 'Samuel Chase' disembarks troops of the U.S. Army's First Division at Omaha Beach, Normandy, on D-Day, June 6, 1944. In our spiritual conflict, 'D-Day' took place on the Cross; we're on the final push to victory.

War II was never in doubt; victory was assured. But the war wasn't over - many battles lay ahead; further casualties would be taken, more lives would be lost.

In our spiritual conflict, 'D-Day' has taken place on the Cross. Our conflict is not yet over, but Jesus's triumph on the Cross assures us of victory in the war. Jesus Christ and His people have overwhelming resources. These are the "*last days*", we're on the final push to victory.



### Foot Note The Book of Revelation

Our battle is fierce. But the final outcome is not in doubt. The Book of Revelation demonstrates this so graphically. Before God shows John the field of battle (Revelation 6.1-20.15), He shows him Who the Victor is. John, in G.B. Caird's words: "is summoned to the control room at Supreme Headquarters" (Revelation 4.1). There he sees God upon His throne (Revelation 4.2-11).

And in the midst of the throne, he sees "*a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain*" (Revelation 5.6). The Lamb – Christ Jesus – is "*the Lion of the tribe of Judah*" (Revelation 5.5) Who alone is worthy "*to take the scroll and to open its seals*" (Revelation 5.9). The course of history and the destiny of all creation lies in His hands. With His blood Jesus has "*purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation*" and "*made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God*" (Revelation 5.9-10 NIV). Through Jesus's work on the Cross, God is creating a new humanity who "*will reign on the earth*" (Revelation 5.10 NIV).

## Our deceptive enemy

Satan's key weapon is **deception**. Right at the beginning, he deceived Eve with his craftiness (2 Corinthians 11.3); John describes him as "*the deceiver of the whole world*" (Revelation 12.9). He's a master of cunning trickery, and so are his servants (see Ephesians 4.14, 2 Timothy 3.13). The bottom line is that Satan wants to be like the Most High (compare Isaiah 14.14). He wants people to worship and serve him instead of God (see Matthew 4.8-10). So he lures people to do this by impersonation. He "*masquerades as an angel of light*"; his lackeys "*masquerade as servants of righteousness*" (2 Corinthians 11.14-15 NIV).

Remember that Satan really is subtle. He won't try to hoodwink us with obvious things. He can disguise himself as an angel of light; he'll try to seduce us with things that seem at first glance wholesome and sensible.

## Called up for conflict

We must all be prepared to encounter conflict in the spiritual realm. We're soldiers called to fight; God has enlisted us in His army, and we can't live like civilians (2 Timothy 2.3-4). God assessed the strength of Israel in the wilderness by how many men were fit for battle (Numbers 1.2-3). And it's no different for His Church. We must know how to fight (see 1 Timothy 1.18).

But we have a subtle enemy. Satan rarely confronts us in pitched battle. Instead, we face guerilla tactics - sabotage and subversion, snipers and booby-traps (see Ephesians 6.11). He'll blur the lines between truth and error, and lay false trails to take us off course and dissipate our resources. And when we think the all-clear has been sounded, when

we've relaxed our guard - suddenly he'll launch an attack. Commenting on Ephesians 6.11, Klyne Snodgrass says, "Mention of the 'schemes' of the devil reminds us of the trickery and subterfuge by which evil and temptation present themselves in our lives. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap."



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Two US college students wrestling. Paul compares our spiritual battle to a wrestling-match (Ephesians 6.12)

Paul compares our battle to a wrestling-match (Ephesians 6.12) and, as Derek Prince pointed out, wrestling: "involves the entire person. It is the most total bodily form of conflict in sport. This is the particular type of contest that Paul uses to illustrate the Christian life."

Two basic rules for soldiers – and for our own Christian lives – are these:

#### ► Soldiers are under orders

Well-trained soldiers obey without question. They will lay down their lives in the line of duty, if called on to do so. We, too, need to learn how to obey God implicitly – just as Jesus Himself did (see John 4.34, 6.38, 8.29, Matthew 26.39). We have power to fight effectively only when we are under God's authority. Submitting to God is vital if we are to resist the Devil (compare James 4.7).

#### ► Soldiers never operate independently

Soldiers operate as a close-knit unit; teamwork, communication, 'looking out' for one another - all these are basic to any military operation.



A photograph taken at Omaha Beach, France on D-Day, 6 June 1944. American troops help comrades ashore, whose landing craft was sunk by enemy action off the French coast. These survivors reached Omaha Beach by using a life raft. Teamwork and mutual support are essential for any military operation – including our own spiritual warfare.

## "The weapons of our warfare"

On our own, we are no match for Satan. But in Christ we have power over him. The basis of our power is Christ's sacrificial death - we overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 12.11). Jesus's sacrificial death paid the penalty for our sin. We who trust in Jesus are declared 'not guilty'. Satan's accusations against us are groundless; he can no longer rightly demand our punishment.

But we must also put on the armour that God has given us. (Ephesians 6.10-18):

► We're to stand "*having fastened on the belt of truth*" (6.14). If the Roman soldier's armour was in Paul's mind, this probably refers to the leather apron which hung under his armour and protected his thighs. Fastening one's clothes securely around the waist is necessary for physical exertion – in this case, readiness for battle. We meet a similar idea in Exodus. God commanded His people to eat the Passover "*with your cloak tucked into your belt*" (Exodus 12.11 NIV), that is, ready for physical action - in their case, departure from Egypt. They had to pull up their robes and secure them ready for action. The "*truth*" here is God's truth as revealed in the gospel (Ephesians 1.13, 4.21). And it's to be outworked in our lives (see Ephesians 4.25, 5.9). We're to walk in **truth**, living lives that are consistent with the truth of the gospel (see 2 John 4, 3 John 4).

► We must protect ourselves with **righteousness** (6.14 and compare 2 Corinthians 6.7). We're to put on "*the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*" (Ephesians 4.24 NIV).

► We're to have our feet properly shod with "*the readiness given by the gospel of peace*" (6.15 – **the gospel of peace** is language drawn from Isaiah 52.7). What is the gospel of peace? Ephesians 2.14-18 shows us – Jesus has created in Himself a new humanity comprising Jew and Gentile, a humanity that is at peace with God. We're to understand this gospel of peace and allow that gospel to shape our thinking and our lives. And we're to proclaim that gospel through our lips and our lives. All this will prepare us for battle. And, paradoxically (as Andrew Lincoln points out), this gospel of peace brings war. This gospel signals the final downfall of Satan's kingdom, and so fuels the evil powers' opposition to God and His people. So we're to be ready for conflict.

► We must grasp the shield of **faith** (6.16 and compare 1 John 5.4-5). The picture here is almost certainly the large Roman shield that protected the whole body. When soaked in water, this shield was able to quench missiles such as flaming arrows. Unswerving, resolute confidence in God's power and faithfulness to us will quench all Satan's assaults and temptations.

► We must put on the helmet of **salvation** (6.17) - the firm assurance that God has rescued us from Satan's dominion and seated us with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2.4-7, 6.17). In Christ, we're in a position of authority greater than any supernatural enemy.

► We have just one weapon - the sword of the Spirit, which is **the word of God** (6.17). The word for "*sword*" refers to the short-handled sword, important for close combat. The sword is God's truth proclaimed with the Holy Spirit's penetrating power (compare 1 Thessalonians 1.5). It's the only weapon we need.





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Roman soldiers charging – a re-enactment by the Ermine Street Guard. The Guard's reconstructions are primarily from the latter half of the first century AD (the period of the early Church).

► Paul emphasises **prayer** (Ephesians 6.18). Jennifer Kennedy Dean said: “Prayer is the most aggressive, proactive, offensive, invasive action one can take in any situation. Prayer reaches into the spiritual realm and accesses all the power of heaven for the circumstances of earth.” Prayer is not just asking for things. Prayer is also waiting on God for His direction and His orders. We see this so clearly in Acts 13.1-2. In response to prayer and fasting, God gave the church at Antioch His specific word: “*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*” (Acts 13.2 NIV). God showed them they were to open a new battle front, led by these two men. So began Paul’s missionary career - a career that God used to change the world.

Finally, notice how Paul emphasises that we’re to **stand** (Ephesians 6.11,13-14). We’re to stand firm - to refuse to give our enemy a foothold in our own personal lives, or in the life of our church. If we resist the Devil, he will flee from us (James 4.7).

We’re to praise God with our lips (Hebrews 13.15); we’re to offer our “*bodies as a living sacrifice*” which is our “*spiritual worship*” (Romans 12.1).

And when we worship God, we assault Satan and his kingdom. Satan hates God, and when we proclaim God’s holiness and goodness, Satan cannot stand it, and he flees. As Peter Leithart put it: “*Worship is . . . a central act of holy war. When Christ is enthroned on our praises, He becomes a terror to our enemies . . .*” God’s enemies fall when His people praise Him (compare 2 Chronicles 20.22).

This must surely explain why the war chronicle of the New Testament - the Book of Revelation - is also its songbook. There are seven scenes of heavenly worship in Revelation (4.8-11, 5.8-14, 7.9-12, 11.16-18, 14.1-3, 15.2-4, 19.1-8). For example, after the living creatures, elders, angels, and every created being praise God (5.8-14), Jesus begins to open the seals of the scroll. After the saints sing the song of Moses (15.2-4), seven angels pour out the seven bowls full of God’s wrath on Earth. It’s almost as if worship is unlocking history!



Painting of John gazing at the 24 elders and the 4 living beings around the throne of God and the Lamb, Revelation 4.1-5.14. This illustration is from the ‘Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry’, a richly decorated Book of Hours (containing prayers to be said at regular times each day) written and decorated in the 15th century. It is held at the Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.

## In heavenly places

We also need to remember that our battleground is in “*the heavenly places*” - an unseen spiritual realm closely linked with our own material world (Ephesians 1.3,20, 2.6, 3.10, 6.12). We can’t see it, but it’s every bit as real as this world, and closer to us than we may suspect. That’s why Revelation focuses so much on what’s happening in heaven.

### Foot Note A life of overcoming

Sin gives Satan a toe-hold, a means of control, over our lives. Every victory over sin is a victory over Satan. Our lives may seem humdrum and insignificant but, in Tim Chester’s words, our “day-to-day struggle to live without compromise is part of a battle that touches heaven itself”. It isn’t just the obvious sins - like immorality and heresy - that we must overcome. It’s also the insidious sins that weaken us: laziness, carelessness, indifference, an unforgiving heart.

Our key battleground is the daily routine of ordinary life. Victory here is the foundation for victory in every field of ministry and endeavour. We may perhaps be called upon to cast out demons and heal the sick - the Gospels and the Book of Acts record many such occasions. But Paul emphasises that spiritual warfare is primarily concerned with our daily life of faith and obedience. That’s where our victory must first be won.

## Worship and warfare

As we saw in Session 3, God gave mankind a priestly role. The Old Testament priests stood in God’s presence and worshipped and served there. We’re “*a royal priesthood*” (1 Peter 2.9, see also 1 Peter 2.5, Revelation 1.6, 5.10, 20.6).



We also catch a glimpse of conflict between heavenly powers in Daniel 10.13,20. So, what goes on here on Earth is only part of the picture. We can't judge things just by

what we see around us. We depend on God's Spirit to show us what's really going on when inexplicable difficulties confront us.

## A brave new world



'The Course of Empire: Destruction' painted by Thomas Cole (1801–1848) and held by the New-York Historical Society. This painting, the fourth of a series of five paintings illustrating the rise and fall of a great city, depicts its fall. Compare this scene with the third scene depicting the height of empire on page 11 of Session 5. The city is being sacked and destroyed. A storm rages in the distance, and it seems that a fleet of enemy warriors has overthrown the city's defences, sailed up the river, and is torching the city and ravaging and killing its inhabitants. The bridge across the river is broken; a makeshift crossing strains under the weight of soldiers and refugees. In his newspaper advertisements for the series, the artist quoted these lines from Lord Byron's poem 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage': "There is the moral of all human tales; / 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past, / First Freedom and then Glory—when that fails, / Wealth, vice, corruption,—barbarism at last. / And History, with all her volumes vast, / Hath but *one* page, . . ."

It will be helpful at this point to remind ourselves of what our enemy, Satan, is really up to. In Session 4 we learnt that Satan wants to be like God Himself (compare Isaiah 14.13-14). He wants to enthrone himself in God's place. And so he wants to do what God does.

God's plan for mankind was that we should colonise the whole Earth, subdue it and make it a paradise. We were to be *culture-builders*. God wanted us to tap Earth's resources and use our God-given skills and powers to develop a wonderful civilisation on Earth. It was to be a civilisation built in dependence on *God's* wisdom and enabling, a society where *God* was honoured, served and worshipped. God wanted Earth to be a paradise where He could live among us (compare Revelation 21.3).

Satan wants to be like God. And therefore he's trying to do, here on Earth, what *God* plans to do. Satan's goal is a counterfeit 'paradise' - a 'utopia'. He's inspiring fallen mankind to use its powers to develop a civilisation on Earth - a global economic, ideological, cultural and political system. But this is a civilisation built in dependence on *Satan's* power, a society where *Satan*, rather than God, is honoured, served and worshipped. The tower of Babel was an early venture; Satan's final attempt will centre on the 'Antichrist', whom we'll look at next.

The question is this: "Can mankind, governed by Satan, really bring paradise to this world without God?" God will not wind up history before this question is answered. So, God is allowing Satan to try to build a godless paradise, until his failure at every point is demonstrated beyond doubt. And, meanwhile, God continues to call out from this godless world a people who will honour and obey Him.

History is littered with attempts to create a paradise through human effort - 'a brave new world'. Cain's sophisticated yet violent culture was the first. Babel was another. In Biblical times, ancient kings strove for glory through magnificent cities and vast empires. Nebuchadnezzar gazed in awe at his achievements before God humbled him (Daniel 4.29-30). More recently, philosophers and revolutionaries of all shades have reached out for Utopia. The writer H. G. Wells, writing in 1922, saw a future bright with promise: "Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, that it will live, . . . in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever widening circle of adventure and achievement?" World War II brought him back to reality.

The kingdoms of this world do indeed have a kind of glory (Matthew 4.8). But when we look more closely, we find that



they're kept going only through fear, corruption, and appalling human misery. And every so often, the conflict and corruption that seethes beneath the surface threatens to blow the whole thing apart.

## The Enlightenment

A watershed in mankind's search for a utopia of his own making was the Age of Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – a period of philosophical and social radicalism. It was believed that humanity could gain knowledge, freedom and happiness through human reason. A major foundation for this idea was a new understanding of the natural world – that it was orderly and rational, and governed by laws that could be investigated and explained. By their own innate rational powers, it was thought, mankind could understand itself and the laws of nature – and, through this knowledge, improve itself. The French philosopher Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, wrote of “the limitless perfectibility of the human species”. This humanistic worldview ignited revolutionary developments in philosophy and politics.

An outstanding turning point was the French Revolution (1789-1799). “Liberty, equality, fraternity”, the national motto of France, originated during the French Revolution – deceptively fine-sounding words that are a humanistic counterfeit of the spiritual freedom, equality before God and brotherly love that are the inheritance of God's people. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* was produced during the French Revolution – as the picture on this page shows, this Declaration is even depicted in the style of the Ten Commandments! See how human reason replaces God's Law as the basis for society.

## Principalities and powers

Satan and his evil principalities and powers lie in the background, guiding people forward along this path to godlessness. Clinton Arnold writes: “Working through people, the powers can pollute a society's traditions and values. They can influence authors, television producers, political thinkers and analysts, pastors, university professors,



'Representation of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen' in 1789', painted by Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier (1738-1826), and held by the Carnavalet Museum, Paris. Note how it parodies a traditional representation of the two tablets of the Law that God gave to Moses.

composers, artists, screenplay writers, economic policy makers, architects of defense strategies and journalists. . . . it is not difficult to imagine how the powers can influence the direction of an entire culture.”

But God is always in control. John Taylor says: “we may be sure that Christ is utterly undimaged at the state of the world. History may seem to have got out of hand, but it has not got out of *His* hands.”

## Antichrist

The word ‘antichrist’ can mean ‘in place of Christ’; it can also mean ‘against Christ’. The prefix *anti* originally meant ‘in the place of’, and then ‘against’. Antichrist wants to be ‘in the place of’ Christ – he tries to mimic Christ, to be a counterfeit Christ.

Several passages of the New Testament are relevant – 2 Thessalonians 2.1-12, 1 John 2.18–23, 4.1-6, 2 John 7, Revelation 13.1-10 and 17.1-18. And Jesus Himself warned of false christs – people who'll try to deceive true believers into following them, not Jesus Christ (Matthew 24.23-24, Mark 13.21-22). And so they're a kind of antichrist – they pretend to be Christ and try to imitate Him.

### The early antichrists

In John's day, “the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4.3) worked in many people to promote a heresy. From 1 John 2.22, 4.2-3, 15, 5.1 we deduce that this heresy denied that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, Who became incarnate in human flesh. In 1 John 2.18 John refers to “many

*antichrists*” – a group of people who were heretics (see 1 John 2.22, 2 John 7).

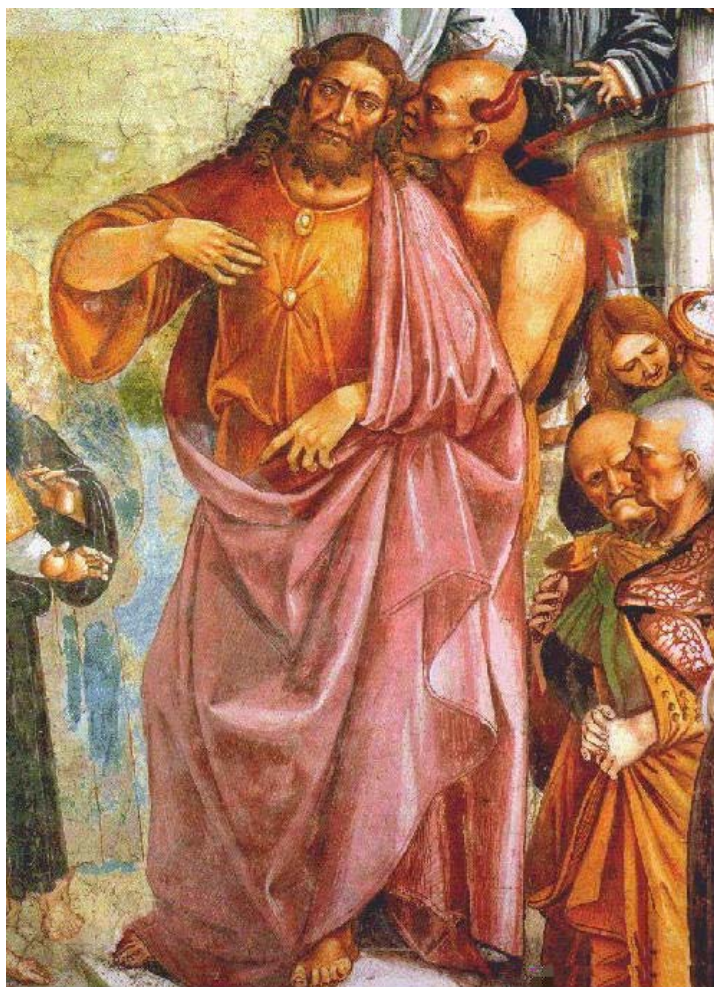
### The Man of Sin

But at the end of this age, anti-Christian heresy will, it seems, finally manifest itself in a single individual – the Antichrist. John said, “as you have heard that antichrist is coming” (1 John 2.18). There were many antichrists in John's day, but he also expected a final Antichrist to arise at the end of the age.

Sin always escalates (compare 2 Timothy 3.13). So we must indeed expect a final climactic revolt against God before our Lord's return. The Bible calls this “the falling away” or “the rebellion” (2 Thessalonians 2.3, NKJV and NIV respectively). It's the climax of what Paul terms “the secret power of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2.7, NIV). It seems that this “falling away” will be a large-scale political and religious revolt against God that crystallises around the leadership of “the man of sin” or “the man of lawlessness”



(2 Thessalonians 2.3, NKJV and NIV respectively). This man is undoubtedly the same as the “*antichrist*” of 1 John 2.18. He’s a satanically inspired man who appears shortly before Jesus’s Second Coming. Paul’s description in 2 Thessalonians 2.3-10 clearly points to a person, rather than just to a power. The final Antichrist is a counterfeit Christ. Just as Christ is a Person, this counterfeit christ is likely to be a person, too.



Detail from 'Sermon and Deeds of the Antichrist' painted by Luca Signorelli (1450–1523) - a large fresco in the Chapel of the Madonna di San Brizio, Orvieto Cathedral, Italy. It's the story of Antichrist told in pictures. This detail shows Antichrist himself.

At first glance, he seems to resemble Christ; but closer scrutiny reveals a sinister image. He is seemingly interrupted in his preaching by Satan embracing him and whispering in his ear, presumably telling him what to preach.

Like Jesus Christ, Antichrist has his ‘coming’ - *parousia* in Greek (2 Thessalonians 2.9). His coming mimics Christ’s coming - also *parousia* in Greek (2 Thessalonians 2.1,8). The Antichrist will advance his cause through deceiving wonders (2 Thessalonians 2.9). These wonders imitate Christ’s own miracles. Antichrist comes through Satan’s activity (2 Thessalonians 2.9). Satan has full control over him.

Antichrist “*opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God*” (2 Thessalonians 2.4). To take “*his seat in the temple of God*” may refer to his monstrous arrogance in taking the honour and reverence that is God’s prerogative alone (rather than to a physical temple building, or to God’s true temple, the Church). His stupendous egocentricity reflects Satan’s own megalomania (compare Isaiah 14.12-14, Ezekiel 28.2). He acts as if he were God. He takes God’s rightful place in people’s hearts; he may even demand to be worshipped as a god.

What brings Antichrist to power and what does he do? Remember that God planned for mankind to subdue the

Earth and make it a paradise where He could live among us. Fallen mankind is unable to do this. But now God has created a new humanity in Christ Jesus. Through the Man Christ Jesus, humanity will fulfil God’s wonderful purposes; we’ll live in God’s immediate presence in paradise.

As we’ve just seen, Satan wants to be like God. Just as God is fulfilling His purposes on Earth through a Man, so Satan tries to fulfil *his* purposes on Earth through a man. God’s Man is Christ; Satan’s man will be a counterfeit Christ - the Antichrist.

The true Christ was God incarnate, God made flesh. But Satan isn’t God, he’s only an angel. And so he can’t become incarnate, like God did. The best he can do is to control a man completely. And that’s what he does with this man called Antichrist. Through Antichrist, Satan will make his final bid to create a counterfeit ‘paradise’ without God, a global civilisation united in rebellion against God and under Satanic domination.

Antichrist will have astonishing natural charisma, fortified by Satanic powers. He’ll promise to solve the world’s political, social, economic and environmental problems. As the world slithers helplessly towards disaster, people will cast about desperately for a ‘saviour’ and will willingly grant him the draconian powers he demands. He’ll claim to be able to save the world – counterfeiting the true salvation that Jesus offers.

### The Beast

The Antichrist is closely connected to the beast of Revelation 13.1-10, which appears again in Revelation 17.1-18. This beast combines the features of the four beasts that Daniel saw hundreds of years earlier, representing the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires (Daniel 7.1-28). John sees them combined into one horrific monstrosity. It seems to picture every anti-Christian power that has ever asserted itself against God and His people. And Daniel’s and John’s visions show us these world powers in their true light - like savage beasts that terrify and devour.

Both the beast and the Antichrist use Satanic power (see 2 Thessalonians 2.9, Revelation 13.2,4 - the Dragon in Revelation 13.2,4 is Satan, as Revelation 12.9 tells us). Both exalt themselves against God (2 Thessalonians 2.4, Revelation 13.5-6). The Antichrist is “*the son of destruction*” (2 Thessalonians 2.3); the beast will go “*to destruction*” at Christ’s return (Revelation 17.8,11). So how are the beast and the Antichrist connected? The beast is the anti-Christian political power that will one day, we assume, be headed up by the personal Antichrist.

### The axis of evil

In summary, then, there seem to be two main anti-Christian forces throughout our period of history between the Lord’s first and second comings. There are heretics who arise from within the Church itself, and anti-Christian political powers that demand allegiance and persecute those who remain true to God. It seems likely that, in the closing years of this age, both anti-Christian forces combine – an anti-Christian regime will be headed up by an individual who is, in Kim Riddlebarger’s words, “*the supreme persecutor of Christ’s church*”, who “*will exercise his reign of terror through state-sponsored heresy*” and act as if he were God Himself.



## Satan's counterfeit trinity

The Dragon, together with the beast we've described above, and "*another beast*" (Revelation 13.11), also called "*the false prophet*" (Revelation 16.13, 19.20, 20.10) form a blasphemous counterfeit of the Trinity. We see all three together in Revelation 16.13. Here, again, we see Satan's monstrous attempt to dethrone the Triune God and take His place.

### The Dragon

The Dragon (Revelation 12.3-17) is Satan himself; he mimics the Father.

### The first beast

The first beast (the one we've already described) represents anti-Christian political power that will one day, we assume, be headed up by the person called Antichrist. The beast is Satan's 'christ' and mimics Christ Jesus:

► Jesus receives power (Revelation 5.12); He is seated with His Father on His throne (Revelation 3.21) and He now has authority (Revelation 2.27, 12.10, see Matthew 28.18). This beast, too, receives power; the dragon gives this beast "*his power and his throne and great authority*" (Revelation 13.2).

► Jesus has followers who have His name – and that of His Father – written on their foreheads (14.1); in 13.16-17 we read about those marked with the beast's name and its number.

► Jesus was resurrected; the beast has an astonishing resurrection which draws the world to follow it (13.3) – most probably referring to the rise of successive oppressive governments and political and ideological systems, despite the fact that the Devil is already a defeated foe. Evil governments and systems have crumbled and fallen throughout history, yet others rise to continue Satan's opposition to God.

► Like the Dragon, the beast has seven heads, ten horns, and is crowned (13.1, compare 12.3); the beast is an 'image' of the Dragon and thus counterfeits Christ, Who is the exact image of the Father (Hebrews 1.3).

► The beast's diadems (Revelation 13.1) mimic Christ's many diadems (19.12).

► The blasphemous names on the beast's heads (13.1) counterfeit Christ's Names (19.11-13,16).

### The second beast

The second beast (Revelation 13.11-18), mimics the Holy Spirit. It's also called the false prophet; it performs "*great signs*" to deceive people. These counterfeit the signs and wonders done through the power of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2.43, 5.12, 8.13, 14.3). The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16.14); this false prophet seduces the world to worship Satan's 'christ', the first beast. The Holy Spirit guides us into truth (John 16.13); the false prophet deceives people.

The false prophet represents, it seems, false religion and godless ideology and philosophy. It brands everyone it seduces with a "*mark*" (Revelation 13.16-17,14.9,11). This mark is "*the name of the beast or the number of its name*" – the beast here is the first beast. So this second beast causes people to be marked with the name of the first beast, a name that has a number. This mark is a Satanic parody of God's seal on His servant's foreheads (Revelation 7.2-8, 14.1).



Image © Pat Marvenko Smith 1982, 1992 [www.revelationillustrated.com](http://www.revelationillustrated.com)

'Babylon the great riding the beast' (see Revelation 17.3-6)

Dennis Johnson comments, "The beast's mark, like the seal of God applied to the church (Revelation 7.1-3), is no outward tattoo or insignia on the body but rather a symbol of the beast's ownership and control of his followers' thoughts (forehead) and deeds (right hands)." The number of the beast's name is "666", explained on the next page.

## "Babylon the great"

In Revelation 17.1-6 the angel shows John "*the great prostitute*" (NIV). This filthy woman is "*Babylon the great*". She's the Satanic counterpart to God's pure Bride, the city of New Jerusalem, which we finally see coming down from heaven in Revelation 21.1-3.

She is sitting on "*a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns*" (Revelation 17.3). Its blasphemous names, and its seven heads and ten horns, identify it as the first beast, which represents (as we've seen) anti-Christian political power that will one day, we assume, be headed up by the person called Antichrist. Babylon is closely associated with this anti-Christian power that's pictured by the beast.

Like New Jerusalem, Babylon is both a city and a woman. The different pictures complement each other, giving us an in-depth view:

### ► The city

The city symbolises **society, civilisation, a kingdom**. A city is a seat of government, a hub of commerce, a centre for science, culture and the arts (see the description of Babylon



in Revelation 18.11-13,22-23), an interdependent community of people. God's city and Satan's city Babylon represent, in T. Desmond Alexander's words, "contrasting worlds". Jerusalem is the Kingdom of God - God's perfect world where He reigns. It's the place where God's people - His new society, the Church - live together in God's presence. Babylon is "*this present world*" (a phrase used in 2 Timothy 4.10); mankind's godless and humanistic civilisation under Satan's domination.

### ► The woman

The woman seems to represent **devotion**. The Bride pictures God's chaste people, whom He loves and who love Him. The prostitute is the idolatrous society under Satan's domination. The true Bride belongs to Christ; the whore is in alliance with the first beast – the anti-Christian political power that will one day, it seems, be headed up by Antichrist. God's Church calls the nations to follow the Lamb and become part of God's community; the prostitute calls the nations to commit fornication with her (Revelation 17.2) and be part of Satan's world system.

### ◆ The Mark of the Beast ◆

The number of the name of the first beast, the one that Babylon the great is allied to, is 666. What does this number mean? There's a clue in the text (Revelation 13.18): "*it is the number of a man*". This seems unlikely to refer (at least, primarily) to one particular individual – for example the Emperor Nero, as some suggest. Numbers in Revelation are symbolic, and that's surely the way this number is best treated, too. For example, three is the number of the Triune God. Four is the number of completeness, with respect to the material creation. There are four cardinal directions (north, south, east and west) and four seasons. The river that flowed out of Eden to water the garden divided into four rivers to water the land around. Seven is three (God's number) added to four (creation's number), and seems to combine the symbolism of both – that is, God's complete accomplishment in creation. A prime example, of course, is God's work of creation itself - God created the Earth in six days, and then rested on the seventh day. The complete period of creation is thus seven days.

So, to get back to our 666. It is, of course, made up of three sixes. Six falls one short of seven, and so seems to represent incompleteness, imperfect accomplishment, and failure. But why is the number of the beast's name a threefold six? It's in imitation of God, Whose number is three. So we can conclude that **666 symbolises the beast's failure – and specifically his failure to achieve on Earth what God alone can do.**

And that's consistent with what we've already learnt. Fallen mankind, inspired by Satan, tries to be like God and do what God does. Satan is inspiring mankind to build a global economic, ideological, cultural and political system, united in rebellion against God - an ambition symbolised by the beast. Go back to our clue in 13.18: the number of the beast "*is the number of a man*". Here is mankind, under Satan's control, trying to be God and do what God does - create a paradise on Earth. But the number carries the idea of failure, too. Fallen mankind always falls short of perfection. In fact, humanity fails totally and spectacularly.

## The restrainer removed

Until now, something has been hindering Satan from raising up the Antichrist and bringing world rebellion to a climax. The agent of this restraint is both a force - "*what is restraining him*" (2 Thessalonians 2.6), and also a personal figure - "*he who now restrains*" (2 Thessalonians 2 7).

What is this restraining power and who is the being who wields this power? The Bible does not clearly identify them. The Thessalonians knew (2 Thessalonians 2.6) – how we wish they could tell us!

Ultimately, of course, it is God who rules over human affairs. It was He Who smashed the conspiracy at Babel (Genesis 11.5-9). Governments and rulers rise and fall at His command; "*the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes*" (Daniel 4.17 NIV); "*The authorities that exist have been established by God*" (Romans 13.1 NIV).

But it may be that God is holding back "*the secret power of lawlessness*" (2 Thessalonians 2.7 NIV) not directly, but through the mediation of an angel. If so, "*what is restraining*" Antichrist is the power that this angel exercises. The Bible does indeed indicate that there are angels in positions of influence over human administrations. In Daniel, we're told of the "*prince of the kingdom of Persia*" (Daniel 10.13) and "*the prince of Greece*" (Daniel 10.20) – both were evidently powerful angels set over the nations of Persia and Greece respectively, and who opposed God's people. We also meet the archangel Michael in Daniel 10.13,21, 12.1, Jude 9 and Revelation 12.7; he was the great angelic guardian of God's people (as Daniel 12.1 explains). And in Revelation 20.1-3, we see an angel binding Satan to prevent him deceiving the nations.

There is a great battle in heavenly realms between God and His hosts and Satan and the powers of darkness. In Sinclair Ferguson's words: "It is clear that behind the scenes of the conflicts of history lies a conflict 'in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6.12), . . . ."

If the restrainer is an angel, then we must assume that God will one day recall him and so withdraw his restraining power. This would allow Satan a clear run to marshal his forces for his final attempt at world domination. The stage



Image © Pensiero / Stefano Corso : Flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)  
Social disorder in Rome, 2010. Antichrist may be being restrained by the thing he rebels against – basic moral law. Such law acts against complete social anarchy, though it doesn't prevent it completely.



is then set for Antichrist's dominion. All hell will then break loose.

Assuming the restrainer is an angel, how then does he exercise this restraint? And how does the removal of this restraint allow Antichrist to rise to power? Three plausible possibilities come to mind.

► **Abandonment of civil order based on moral law** The most obvious inference is that Antichrist is restrained by the thing he rebels against – basic moral law. Such law preserves a minimum level of justice and decency and prevents complete social anarchy. In Romans 13.1-7 Paul speaks of the “governing authorities” as “instituted by God” and says that “rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad”. The “one who is in authority” is “God's servant for your good”. Peter also says, “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Peter 2.13-14).



Mao Zedong or Mao Tse-tung (1893–1976) and Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) together at a ceremony arranged for Stalin's 70th birthday in Moscow in December 1949. One estimate calculates that, between them, Mao and Stalin's respective regimes in the People's Republic of China and the USSR were responsible, directly or indirectly, for 60 million deaths.

Of course, basic moral law has been swept aside many times over the last two millennia. Stalin's brutal regime in Russia (under which some estimate as many as 20 million people died) and the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust stand out in modern memory. An appalling recent example was in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime, who held sway from 1975 to 1979. It's estimated that perhaps around 1.7 million (out of a population of around 7 million) were killed, tortured to death, or perished through disease, starvation, forced labour, or other hardships. Kim Jong-il's regime in North Korea is a current example. But we have not yet seen the final global tyranny that the Bible predicts – and which will, perhaps, eclipse anything that humanity has yet suffered.

But we do now see signs of its emergence. The rise of secular humanism, the erosion of moral absolutes, the increasing moral permissiveness that now characterises modern Western society, the fragility of the world's economic systems that cry out for a strong hand to stabilise them – all these are surely forerunners of mankind's final rebellion under the Antichrist.

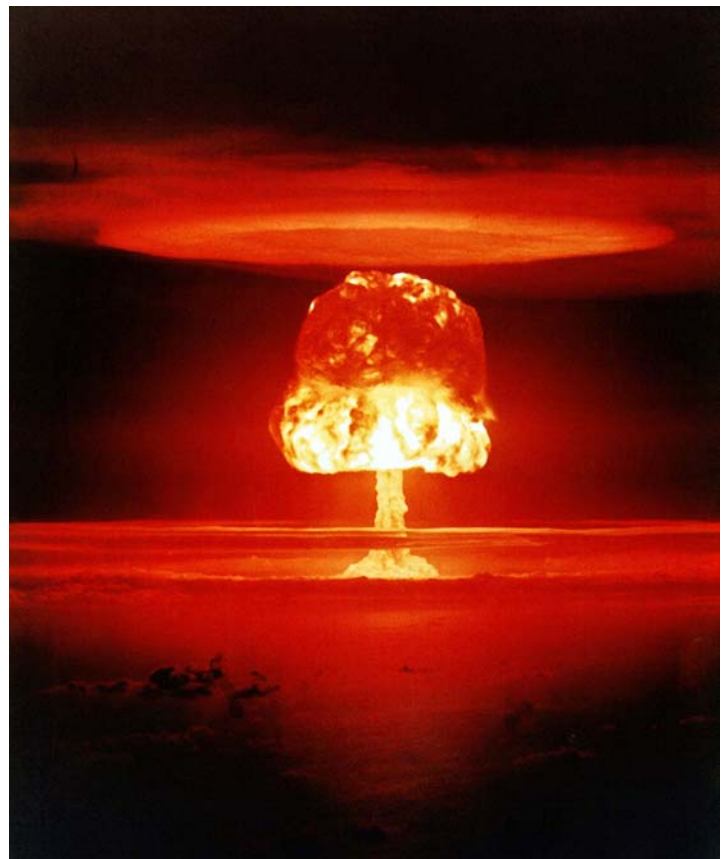
► **Globalisation** also signals the rise of the final Antichrist. After the Flood, God limited mankind's ability to accumulate knowledge and skill by shortening people's lives, and dividing them into diverse language groups. These two factors restrain mankind's power to defy God



Image © Guwashi999 (Guwashi from Tokyo, Japan) at the English language Wikipedia (CC BY 2.0)  
Globalisation: a busy intersection in Tokyo, where East meets West

and to create a godless and global utopia. But now the language barriers that God erected as a restraint are being breached, with the rise of English as an international medium for education, science and trade. The information explosion begun centuries ago with the invention of printing, and now fuelled by the Internet, computerised databases and electronic publishing, is allowing swift transfer of ideas across the globe.

► **Technology** Once, lack of technological development restrained mankind's power. But that restraint is dwindling fast through such developments as today's ease of travel and communication, and the astonishing technological advances that can (for example) enable everyone's personal details and financial transactions to be monitored and controlled centrally. Such developments, together with the appalling power of modern weaponry, can now provide a



An image of the appalling power of modern weaponry. A nuclear bomb test, code named Castle Romeo, one of the Operation Castle series of American nuclear tests, and detonated on March 27, 1954 at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. It produced a yield of 11 megatons, the third largest test ever conducted by the United States. The hideous mushroom cloud from this nuclear explosion is an ominous symbol of our modern power to destroy ourselves and our world.



platform on which a few – or just one person - could control the lives of countless millions. Worldwide domination by one evil man is now possible in a way it never has been before.



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The beginning of the computer age. A reconstructed Colossus computer - the original machine was the world's first electronic, digital, fixed-program, single-purpose computer with variable coefficients. Colossus computers were used by British codebreakers during World War II to help in the cryptanalysis of the German Lorenz cypher, at Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire, England. The prototype, Colossus Mark 1, was operational at Bletchley Park by 5 February 1944. An improved Colossus Mark 2 first worked on 1 June 1944. Here, Tony Sale and his colleague process an enciphered message with a reconstructed Colossus machine in 2006.

## The Tribulation

Does Antichrist's rule mean a great period of trouble and distress for mankind? Many people do expect mankind to suffer an intense period of great tribulation before Jesus's return. The Bible mentions a great tribulation in three places in the ESV (it's only translated "*great tribulation*" once in the NIV, in Revelation 7.14).

► **Matthew 24.21** records Jesus's prophecy of a great tribulation. The immediate reference is undoubtedly the time of unspeakable horror suffered by the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem during the First Jewish-Roman War in AD 66-73, which climaxed in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Romans in **AD70**. Tens of thousands in the city died. But there may well be a double reference here – the horrors of that war may be a foretaste of a time of unprecedented distress and catastrophe that will overtake the world at the end of this age.

► **Revelation 2.22** promises that the false prophetess Jezebel and her followers will suffer great tribulation – this is specific to the local church situation at Pergamos.

► **Revelation 7.14** The great tribulation spoken of here afflicts a vast assembly from all nations, tribes and tongues, and most probably depicts the sufferings of all God's people throughout the Church Age (see John 16.33, Acts 14.22, 2 Timothy 3.12). But it will doubtless rise to a crescendo as this age draws to its close.

In summary, then, there has been tribulation ever since Jesus's days. But the Bible clearly indicates that there will be a final crescendo of tribulation as the cosmic conflict of the ages – between God and His servants, and the forces of

darkness – comes to its climax. That climax is gathering pace; the last 100 years has witnessed more devastating wars and more terrible atrocities than any comparable period in history. They foreshadow a final dreadful period of global tribulation before Jesus returns.

### Foot Note Armageddon

Three evil spirits spew out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, and gather the kings of the Earth to the great final battle at a place called 'Armageddon' (Revelation 16.13-16). This name has passed into language and legend as the apocalyptic battle of the end times.

'Armageddon' appears only here in Revelation 16.16. There have been a number of suggestions as to what this name means; the two strongest are as follows:

- The most likely meaning is 'mountain of Megiddo'. Megiddo was the name of a fortified city in Northern Palestine. The "*waters of Megiddo*" (Judges 5.19) and the plain of Megiddo (2 Kings 23.29-30, paralleled in 2 Chronicles 35.20-24) were the scene of battles involving Israelites.

The idea of a mountain being the scene of the last battle may have been drawn from two Old Testament passages.

The first passage is Ezekiel's prophecy of 38.1-39.29 of Gog and Magog. This prophecy foretells the final assault of the forces of evil against God's people in the latter times – a battle that will take place on "*the mountains of Israel*" (38.8, 39.2,4,17). In fact, the Apostle John draws on this prophecy to depict the final battle of Satan and his forces against God's people (Revelation 20.7-10).

A second passage that seems to provide background is Zechariah 12.11, which says "*the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo*". The context here is of the latter days that began with Jesus's first coming. Against Jerusalem will gather "*all the nations of the earth*"; but God will give victory to Jerusalem and Judah, and follow that by bringing spiritual renewal to them (Zechariah 12.1-13.9).

But Armageddon most probably doesn't refer to a specific geographic location. Rather, that name is using Megiddo's association with battles against God's people to symbolise the great battle between the forces of darkness and God and His people across the whole Earth.

- Another suggestion is that the name Armageddon is derived from the Hebrew *har mō'ēd*, meaning 'mount of assembly'. As Peter Leithart points out, "Throughout the Bible, mountains and hills are places where God meets with man" (see, for example, Isaiah 2.2-3, Micah 4.1-2). He chose Mount Zion as His dwelling place; symbolically, He lives there with His people (Hebrews 12.22-23). Under this interpretation, then, Armageddon represents God and His people assembled in His presence. So again we have the idea of God's enemies gathering together against Him and His people.

Either way, the battle of Armageddon is a spiritual battle between the forces of evil and God and His loyal servants that rises to its climax before our Lord's return. It's the final climax of the battle that began in the Garden of Eden, when Satan gatecrashed God's garden sanctuary and launched his subtle attack on Adam and Eve.





Photo by DAVID ILIFF. (License: CC-BY-SA 3.0)

London - a world financial centre. The financial systems of the world seem at breaking point, with untold consequences for society. The fragility of the world's economic systems cries out for a strong hand to stabilise them. This may well be one of the factors that pave the way for the rise of the Antichrist.

## The story of the Church

The Book of Revelation was written to seven churches in what is now western Turkey (Revelation 2.1-3.22). Perhaps around 40 or 50 years had passed since these churches had been founded. Only two escaped our Lord's rebuke; the rest had all fallen away to a greater or lesser degree from the purity of life and witness that the Lord looks for in His Church. We see corruption, lovelessness, lukewarmness and deadness afflicting the Church even in those early days.

### Deceivers in the Church

The first strategy of the great Deceiver is to deceive the Church, and he wastes no time. Jesus Himself forewarned us about false christs (Matthew 24.4-5, 23-24). The apostolic writers warn of false apostles (2 Corinthians 11.12-15); false teachers (Romans 16.17-18, 1 Timothy 4.1-3, 2 Peter 2.1-3, Jude 4, 8, 11-16); people who won't put up with sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4.3-4); savage wolves who would come among God's people, and men who teach twisted things in order to draw people to themselves (Acts 20.29-30). In Session 12 we saw the Judaisers at work, trying to straitjacket the Church with Old Testament legalism. It's not a pretty picture. The Church may have plenty of problems now, but it's always been that way.

### The battle for truth

All sorts of heresies arose in the early days. The battle for truth focused on two especially vital doctrines - the **Trinity** and the **Incarnation**.

► **The Trinity** God is Three Persons but one Substance. It took many years for the Church's understanding of this mysterious truth to come to maturity. Two heresies relating to the Trinity were **modalism** and **Arianism**. Modalism countered the idea that there are three Persons in the Godhead. It taught that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are simply the three ways (or 'modes') in which the One God manifests Himself - that is, they are not three Persons. **Arius** (about AD250-336) taught that Christ was the first and greatest of created beings, and that He in turn created the universe. Some Arians also believed that the Holy Spirit was the first and greatest of the beings created

by the Son. A form of Arianism continues today in the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

► **The Incarnation** Jesus is fully God and fully Man; He is One Person with two natures - divine and human. The incarnation was hotly debated, and became surrounded by its own crop of heresies. The two Trinitarian heresies mentioned above challenged the doctrine of the Incarnation as well as the Trinity. Another heresy, **docetism**, taught that God hadn't really become flesh and blood. There were a number of variations of this heresy; full-blooded docetists declared that the Man Jesus was an apparition. John may have had people with docetic leanings in view in 1 John 4.2-3 and 2 John 7. Docetism was related to **Gnosticism**, a pot-pourri of error which flooded the Church in the 2nd century. A key principle was **dualism**. The typical gnostic taught that the physical world was evil and quite separate from, and opposed to, the world of spirit. To be saved, you had to escape from the physical realm of existence, at death, into 'spiritual' existence. Only some people could be saved; and, to be saved, you needed to be enlightened by special 'knowledge' (Greek *gnosis*).

### The creeds

But heresy worked for good, too. It forced the Church to define accurately what it believed. Church councils such as that at **Nicaea** (AD325) and **the first Council of Constantinople** (AD 381) convened to sort out what Christians should believe. The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation stretch our understanding; to express them in words that everyone can understand is a real challenge. But the early Church theologians thought long and hard and handed down the fruits of their labours to us in a number of 'creeds' (from the Latin *credo*, meaning 'I believe'). These include the **Apostles' Creed**, the **Nicene Creed**, and the **Athanasian Creed**.

### The canon of Scripture

During the early centuries, the Church also sorted out which of the New Testament writings were inspired by God



and inerrant (called the ‘canon’ of Scripture, from the Greek *kanon*, meaning ‘measuring rod’), and which were to be treated like any other book. It began during the apostles’ lifetimes. Peter talks about Paul’s letters and “*the other Scriptures*” (2 Peter 3.16) implying that Paul’s writings were inspired and authoritative. The whole process was pretty well finished by the 4th century. It was a giant leap forward in the battle for truth - now people could know for sure what books God had authorised and what were just the writings of men.

During the period between the return from Exile and Jesus’s birth, the Jewish Scriptures had been gathered together into the Old Testament largely as we know it today (though it isn’t known when the 39 books of our Old Testament were finally ‘fixed’ as the official canon). They were also translated into Greek (this translation is called the Septuagint) thus enabling a much wider range of people to read them. So now the whole Bible as we know it today was available in its original languages, and also in Greek throughout. Translations into other languages were being made, too, in those early times.

One point of contention remains the ‘Apocrypha’ – 12 Old Testament books that were included in the Septuagint translation. All are accepted by the Roman Catholic Church as canonical; four are accepted by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Protestant denominations, however, exclude them from the canon of Scripture.



The basilica of Saint Sabina at the Aventine, in Rome. This is a very ancient church building, completed around 432 AD, only a century or so after the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great. This church is a ‘basilica’, which was typically a rectangular building with a central nave, aisles on each side and a semi-circular alcove or ‘apse’ at one end. The exterior of the church looks much as it did when it was built nearly 1,600 years ago. It’s thought to have been built on the site of a house belonging to a woman called Sabina – a house that may itself have been used as a church.

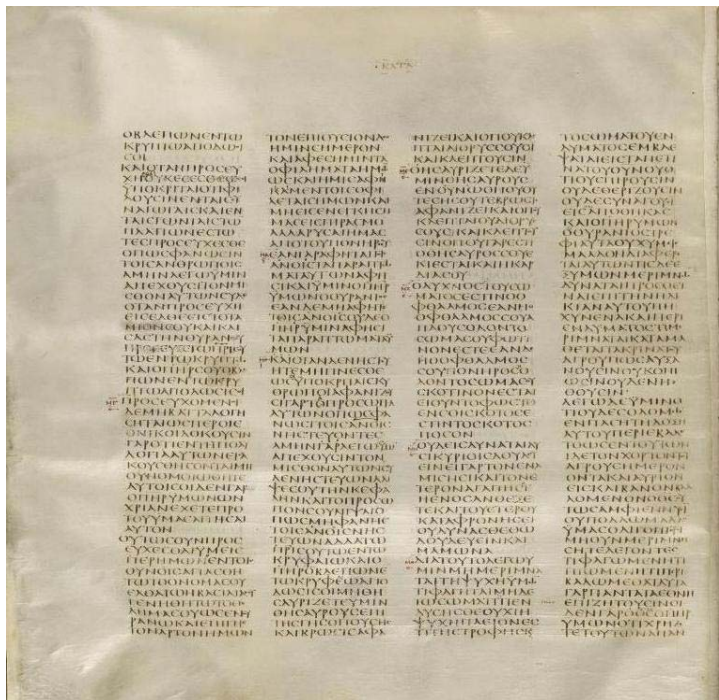
and perhaps adapted for use by the church; from around AD250 larger buildings and halls were introduced; from the time of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (who took control of the whole western Roman Empire in AD 312 and then the entire empire in AD 324) the traditional kind of church and cathedral buildings that we’re familiar with came into being.

Meeting in homes was a practical necessity for the New Testament Church, but the household also provided the basic model for church life. Abandonment of this model went hand in hand with a sad decline of corporate life in the Church. Vincent Branick comments: “Leadership became concentrated in fewer hands, the hands of a special class of holy people. Church activities became stylized ritual. The building rather than the community became the temple of God.”

**The leadership**

As early as the end of the first century, a distinction between the ‘ordinary’ believers (‘laity’) and the leaders (‘clergy’) came into being. Ignatius of Antioch (died between AD 98 and 117) insisted that one man - called the ‘bishop’ - should have paramount authority over the elders, deacons and other members of each local church. He said that only this man (or someone chosen by him) could officiate at the Lord’s Supper. And he said it was unlawful to baptise someone without the bishop being present.

Within 40 years or so, this view of local church government had prevailed. Why was this? One reason is natural group dynamics. It’s pretty well inevitable that, in a group of leaders of a local congregation, one individual will emerge as the prime leader. James, the brother of Jesus, is an example – he came to be regarded as the leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 15.13-21, 21.18). Having a single authoritative leader did offer some protection against ambitious but unsuitable individuals grasping power in a local church – an example of such a power-seeker is Diotrefes, named and shamed in 3 John 9-10. And it was easier for one gifted leader, rather than a group of leaders, to ensure theological conformity. Ignatius of Antioch (died between AD 98 and 117) thought that the idea of a single ‘bishop’ with paramount authority was the best defence against heresy. In time, the bishop changed from being the leader of a



Page of the Codex Sinaiticus, a very ancient and highly prized Greek manuscript of the New Testament, written around AD 325-360. The Codex Sinaiticus came to the attention of scholars in the 19th century at the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Mount Sinai, with further material discovered in the 20th and 21st centuries. Most of the manuscript is held by the British Library. It originally contained the whole of both Testaments. Approximately half of the Greek Old Testament (or Septuagint) has survived, along with a complete New Testament, plus two other non-canonical texts.

**Institutionalisation**

Doctrinal heresy wasn’t the only problem. As time went on, there were great changes in how the Church met together and organised itself - changes that ended up in a mainstream Church that was pretty much unrecognisable from the one Paul knew.

At first, the local churches met in private homes; from around AD150, a room in a home may have been set aside



single church confined to an urban area to being the leader of the churches in a given geographical area. In the 4th century, a formal hierarchy came into being, with the bishop at the top. In this way, a hierarchical authority structure formed, with (eventually) the Bishop of Rome (who became known as the Pope) in the Roman Catholic Church and the various bishops of the Eastern Orthodox Church at the top.

This leadership model was authoritarian. A very early example of the way things were going is the letter of Ignatius of Antioch to the church at Smyrna: “You should all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father. Follow, too, the presbytery [eldership] as you would the apostles; and respect the deacons as you would God’s law. Nobody must do anything that has to do with the Church without the bishop’s approval. You should regard that Eucharist [Lord’s Supper] as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. Without the bishop’s supervision, no baptisms or love feasts are permitted. On the other hand, whatever he approves pleases God as well. In that way everything you do will be on the safe side and valid.”

There can be no doubt that this leadership model suppressed and largely extinguished Jesus Christ’s leadership of the local church through the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit.



The walls and ceilings of the presbytery (the part of the church reserved for the clergy) in the Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy are covered in breathtakingly colourful and beautifully designed mosaics. This very ancient church, completed in around AD 548, is one of the most important examples of early Christian Byzantine art and architecture in western Europe. It’s the only major church from the period of the Emperor Justinian I to survive virtually intact to the present day. But beautiful though this building is, it’s a far cry from the domestic surroundings of the meetings of the early Church.



A Russian Orthodox bishop (centre) and his clergy celebrating the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper) using the very ancient Liturgy of St. James – an old (perhaps 4th century) form of the Divine Liturgy. Such ritual is very different from the simple way that the churches broke bread together in Paul’s day.

By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century bishops were being called priests – people who acted as mediators between God and the rest of the people. The elder in charge of each local church came to be delegated a share in the bishop’s priestly status, and also became known as a priest. As Christianity spread and parish churches were established, the parish priest took on more of the bishop’s functions.

Strictly speaking, the word ‘priest’ in English has its origin in the New Testament Greek word for ‘elder’, *presbuteros*. But it came to mean someone who was a mediator between God and his congregation (the Latin word *sacerdos*). The bishops and priests administered the Eucharist (another name for the Lord’s Supper). In time, they took the role of hearing confession and granting absolution (forgiveness of sins). So the bishops and then their delegates, the priests, took on the role of God’s chief representatives to the people.

People came to believe that baptism made people Christians (‘baptismal regeneration’). So bishops and priests were essential for salvation, as only they could baptise people! This was utterly foreign to the Biblical concept of church leadership, and a throwback to the Old Testament order of things that Jesus had fulfilled once and for all.

### The meetings

This change in the leadership went hand in hand with a change in what went on when believers met together. The clergy began to dominate the proceedings. Ralph P. Martin tells us that within a century or so of Paul’s death, “The day of the spontaneously offered worship in which all the members of the congregation share at will (as in 1 Corinthians 14) is over; and we are approaching the era of service-books and liturgies.”

That pattern continues in most churches today, whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant. Even where prayer books and written orders of service aren’t used, there’s usually little, if any, space for individuals to bring teachings, prophecy, messages of wisdom and knowledge, prayers and testimonies, as led by the Spirit. Meetings typically conform to unwritten but rigid patterns. The congregation are limited to saying “Amen” to the prayers, responding in carefully scripted ways, or joining in the





A simple Saxon church – dating from the early 11th century or earlier. St Laurence's Church, Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire, England is historically important because it's one of very few Saxon churches in England that survive without major alteration. There's evidence that Saint Aldhelm founded it around 705, but the architectural style suggests a 10th or 11th century date – perhaps a rebuilding on the foundations of Aldhelm's original church.

songs. The sequence of songs, prayers, readings and sermon that characterise so many modern 'worship services' is in practice an unwritten liturgy that excludes participation of the kind Paul describes. The ministry of the few has replaced the ministry of the many; liturgies - written or otherwise - have replaced the Spirit's leadership of the meeting.

Why has this come about? Two reasons doubtless were fear of disorder, and distrust of 'ordinary' or untrained people's gifting. In an 'open' Spirit-led meeting, people may sometimes contribute in ways that don't build up the church. Proceedings may even get 'untidy' on occasions. It's tempting to respond to such problems by curbing open participation. This will reduce the risk of disorder, but can easily suffocate the Spirit's ministry through members of the body. Gordon Fee comments, "By and large the history of the church points to the fact that in worship we do not greatly trust the diversity of the body. Edification must always be the rule, and that carries with it orderliness so that all may learn



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Cologne Cathedral was begun in 1248, halted in 1473, and completed, to the original plan, in 1880. It is 144.5 metres (474 ft) long, 86.5 m (284 ft) wide and its towers are approximately 157 m (515 ft) tall. It's the largest Gothic church in Northern Europe and has the second-tallest spires of any church in the world. The church was completed in the 19th century by public and state funding at an estimated cost of over US\$1 billion in today's money. This magnificent building's architectural ostentation and use of worldly funding methods is a complete contrast to the New Testament concept of the local church.

and all be encouraged. But it is no great credit to the historical church that in opting for 'order' it also opted for a silencing of the ministry of the many."

### False doctrine and corruption

Baptism and the Lord's Supper began to be treated like magic rites. As we've seen, people began to believe that the actual act of baptism imparted salvation. In time, also, the Lord's Supper was no longer included as part of a larger meal. It became a ritual token meal – which itself robbed it of much of its meaning as a fellowship meal. Early on, too, the bread and wine were considered to be the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ (a heresy that much later, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, became known as transubstantiation). Justin Martyr (an early Church father who lived around AD 100-165) wrote: "For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Saviour being incarnate by God's word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus." And so the Lord's Supper came to be treated as a sacrifice. His body and blood were thought to be offered afresh to God each time the Lord's Supper was celebrated.

Links were forged between Church and State. The first instance of this was during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (died AD 337). An unholy alliance between Church and State dominated Europe for centuries. But God's people aren't citizens of this world; they are "foreigners and exiles" in this world (1 Peter 2.11 NIV). The Church is separate from the world and its institutions.

Church tradition and its leadership came to be accorded authority alongside that of the Bible for doctrine and conduct. Saints and relics began to be venerated; images began to be used in worship; devotion to Mary the mother of Jesus took root. And over the centuries the Church was beset by gross immorality, materialism, and abuse of power.

### Resistance and reaction

The Church began as an organism - flexible and adaptable, focused on community and relationships; it became an organisation, an institution with a rigid and hierarchical structure with a dominating leadership, and riddled with corruption.

But in the centuries before the Reformation, there were a number of individuals and groups who opposed the unbiblical doctrines and corruption of the institutional Church. Unfortunately, much of the information we have about them comes from their enemies, and so it's difficult to know how faithful to Scriptural teaching they actually were. One group was the Waldenses, who came into being in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and in time infiltrated much of Europe. They rejected much of the Catholic ritual and tradition, preached the Bible without official sanction, and rejected the intermediary role of the clergy.

From the 14<sup>th</sup> century, reaction against the ungodliness and non-Biblical teaching and practice of the Roman Catholic Church gained strength. John Wycliffe (about 1329-1384), a courageous English scholar and Catholic priest, was a key figure in this; he's often called 'the Morning Star of the Reformation'. His thinking about Church doctrine and practice became firmly based on the New Testament.





'The Dawn of the Reformation' painted by William Frederick Yeames (1835-1918) and held by The Suter Art Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand. The artist depicts Wycliffe giving some of his 'poor priests' (also called 'Lollards' or 'Bible Men') his translation of the Bible.

He held to the priesthood of all believers, and that any true believer could administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. And he thought the Church should be separate from the State. His band of 'Bible-Men' or 'Lollards', who studied the



A page from a copy of John Wycliffe's Bible made in the late 14th century. The pocket-sized copy contains segments of the New Testament, probably for use by a wandering preacher, perhaps a Lollard. This page contains the beginning of John's Gospel. The gospel itself begins at the large, decorated 'I' and reads: "In þe bigynnyng was þe word . . ." (the 'þ' is the character used for 'th').

Bible and travelled out to preach to the people, had a tremendous impact on England. He was responsible, with the assistance of others, for producing the first complete English Bible. Now English people could read it for themselves in their own language, rather than depend on the priests to read and interpret it for them.

## Renaissance

During this period of history, too, the **Renaissance** (which means 'rebirth') was sweeping across Europe, with a new spirit of enquiry and thirst for learning. Alongside this there was a renewed interest in the Bible and God's truths. Printing was invented; the Latin Bible printed at Mainz in Germany and published in around 1455 by Johann **Gutenberg** was the first known book to be printed using movable metal type. Bibles and books could now be produced and distributed in a way undreamed of before. It was a watershed in history.



Image © NYC Wanderer / Kevin Eng : en.wikipedia.org (CC BY-SA 2.0)

A copy of the Gutenberg Bible held by the New York Public Library, printed around 1455 in Mainz by Johann Gutenberg. Forty-eight complete copies or substantial portions survive of perhaps some 165 to 180 copies originally produced.

## Reformation

The key figure in this period of Church reform (called 'the Reformation') was **Martin Luther** (1483-1546). In 1512 he saw that peace with God couldn't be obtained through anything he could do, but only through faith in God based on the work of Christ Jesus. His life was transformed. On 31 October 1517 he posted his famous '95 theses' on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, attacking the Roman Catholic practice of selling 'indulgences' (which offered forgiveness of sins in return for money). This challenge to the Roman Church sparked a storm of controversy across Europe. In Peter Leithart's words, Luther's discovery of the heart of the true gospel: "radically and permanently changed European civilization". The Reformation had begun in earnest.

The Reformers held that Scripture was the only infallible and inerrant source of Christian doctrine. They produced many 'confessions' (formal statements of belief); **John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion**, first published in 1536, remains a foundation of Reformed theology.

The Reformers emphasised that every believer had direct access to God themselves, rather than through the priests. But though they reformed Church doctrine and teaching, they didn't restore Church corporate life to the New Testament pattern. Bible teaching was indeed given its rightful place, but the role of the 'minister' or 'pastor' was quite dominant and inhibited participation by other





Detail from portrait of Martin Luther around the age of 50 by Lucas Cranach the Elder (held by the Museum der Stadt, Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany).

believers as indicated by 1 Corinthians 14.26. Luther and other Reformers also retained infant baptism and the link between Church and State.

But it's interesting that Luther did (at least at one point) see the value of a more New Testament pattern of meeting.

He wrote: "Those, however, who are desirous of being Christians in earnest, and are ready to profess the Gospel with hand and mouth, should register their names and assemble by themselves in some house to pray, to read, to baptize and to receive the sacrament [by which Luther meant the Lord's Supper] and practise other Christian works. . . . Here there would not be need of much fine singing. Here we could have baptism and the sacrament in short and simple fashion: and direct everything towards the Word and prayer and love. Here we should have a good short Catechism about the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. In one word, if we only had people



A portrait of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466?–1536) by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/1498–1543) and held by the National Gallery, London. Erasmus was a famous scholar and theologian. He prepared the first published Greek New Testament – a landmark event in Bible translation. The first edition of this Greek New Testament, entitled 'Novum Instrumentum Omne' was published in 1516 (the Greek text was in parallel with a Latin version). The second (1519) edition (called the 'Novum Testamentum Omne') was used by Martin Luther in translating the Bible into German. The third (1522) edition was probably used by Tyndale for the first English New Testament translated from the original Greek (published in 1526) and was also the basis for the 1550 Robert Stephanus edition used by the translators of the King James Version.

who longed to be Christians in earnest, Form and Order would soon shape itself. But I cannot and would not order or arrange such a community or congregation at present. I have not the requisite persons for it, nor do I see many who are urgent for it. But should it come to pass that I must do it, . . . then I will gladly do my part to secure it, and will help it on as best I can." Luther didn't think he had the right people for this kind of meeting - nor did he think that many people actually wanted to meet like this. Political expediency also got the better of him. So he never put it into practice.



Luther's study at Wartburg Castle, Thuringia, Germany, taken at the end of the 19th century. It was here in this room that, among other writing work, Luther began to translate the New Testament from Greek into German. An original first edition is kept in the case on the desk. The New Testament was published in 1522. The complete Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha, was published in 1534; this was a collaborative effort by Luther and others.

## The Radical Reformation

But another group was more radical than the Reformers – they were labelled 'anabaptists' (meaning 'rebaptisers') because they repudiated infant baptism and baptised only believers. In their early years in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Anabaptism was, in one scholar's words, a "spontaneous, decentralized, grassroots, underground movement of spiritual renewal and biblical reform, carried out by 'common people' of no theological expertise." They held that the Church was the community of God's redeemed children alone. They rejected the Reformers' idea that the Church embraced the whole of society. Those dubbed 'anabaptists' were a diverse group that included extremists and some who embraced false teaching. But what we might call the 'typical' anabaptist was a true believer who insisted on, among other things, new birth and holiness of life, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and participation in their meetings by all gifted to do so, according to 1 Corinthians 14.26 (in contrast to the Reformed churches).

They endured severe persecution for their beliefs in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and into the 17<sup>th</sup> century from both Catholics and Protestants. Present-day churches derived from the anabaptists include the Mennonites and the Amish communities.

## Stagnation and Strife

The 'mainstream' Reformers themselves seemed to go so far, and then stop. One of the Puritans, John Robinson, sent the Pilgrim Fathers off on their journey to the New World in 1620 with this message: ". . . I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who . . . will go at present no farther than the instruments of their



reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; . . . and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented . . .”

In Session 12 we saw this stagnating principle at work in the apostolic church in Jerusalem. John W. Kennedy comments, “Light which God had given had become crystallized in an unalterable tradition”. And that has happened time and again throughout Church history - churches and denominations have got to a point where they no longer move further into the life and teaching of the Holy Spirit, and so they fossilise.

Another tragedy was division. As the Reformation gathered pace, and on into recent times, Protestants and other dissenters began gathering around specific doctrines and practices. John W. Kennedy wrote: “Protestantism, divided into innumerable parties, was the scene of the bitterest internal strife.”

## Revival and renewal

But time and again, God has burst through such stagnation and strife to breath new life into the dying embers.



'Haugianerne' ('The Haugians') painted in 1852 by Adolph Tidemand and held by the Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo. It depicts a small group of Norwegian believers involved in the Haugean movement. This was an offshoot of Pietism that took its name from Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824), a Norwegian lay preacher. They are meeting in a simple way, in what appears to be an ordinary house or farm building. This was at a time when Norwegians weren't allowed to meet in gatherings not supervised by a State Church pastor (the State Church was Lutheran).

A key reforming thrust after the Reformation was 'Pietism'. Phillip Jacob Spener (1635–1705) is commonly regarded as the father of this movement. He advocated more intensive Bible study individually and in groups. Though the Reformed church believed in the priesthood of all believers, the clergy still dominated; Spener wanted this truth to work out in actual practice through greater involvement by ordinary believers. He encouraged practical holiness and love in action, and preaching that built up believers. Spener organised *collegia pietatis* ('schools of piety') – discipleship groups in which Christians met for Bible study and mutual edification. The Moravian Church (with its special missionary emphasis) was one fruit of Pietism, and it was Moravians who inspired John Wesley, co-founder of Methodism.

The **First Great Awakening** in the United States and the **Evangelical Revival** in Britain during the 18th century were tremendous moves of God. Key leaders were **Jonathan Edwards** (in the United States), **George Whitefield** (in



Image © National Portrait Gallery, London (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)  
A portrait of John Wesley (1703-1791) aged 85 after George Romney (1734-1802) and held at the National Portrait Gallery, London, U.K.

Britain and the US) and the **Wesleys** in Britain. The **Second Great Awakening** in America followed, lasting from the 1790s to the 1840s. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a number of revivals broke out in various places, including the US, Britain and other parts of Europe. The early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of the **Pentecostals**.

And over the centuries, different groups emerged who tried to follow the New Testament pattern of church life, notably the **Plymouth Brethren** of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. More recently, the 'charismatic' and 'restoration' movements have, to varying degrees, sought to return to simple New Testament principles of church life, emphasising participation by every believer as they are led and gifted by the Holy Spirit.

## To the ends of the Earth

The revival flames of the 1700s kindled a new and world-embracing missionary endeavour to bring God's good news



Members of the China Inland Mission before departure for China on the tea clipper 'Lammermuir' in 1866, led by James Hudson Taylor (centre, holding one of his children, with his wife Maria to the right of him). Their arrival in China was a turning point in missionary work in China. The China Inland Mission resolved never to appeal for financial support, relying only on God. They also identified with the people among whom they worked by wearing local clothes - a new concept in missionary work.



