
Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
Volume 13, Number 4, November 2002

A Star Called Wormwood

Islam, Orthodoxy, and Catholicism in Prophecy

The third church, the third seal, and the third trumpet together weave a tapestry that shows the challenges God's people have met and triumphed over through Christ. Yet, their historic importance is relevant to our day, for a star called "Wormwood" and the church in Pergamos directly relate to the challenge of terrorism and warfare in Afghanistan that have riveted the world's attention.

As we stand upon the sea of glass we see these passions focus on the remarkable personality of one man — Muhammad. Those who profess Islam consider Muhammad to be the seal of prophecy that is, the final and greatest prophet supplanting all others. In the book of Revelation our Lord casts a different light on these claims if we see the rise of Islam and reference to Muhammad as a star called Wormwood (Revelation 8:10-11). And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

The teachings of Muhammad this star called Wormwood and Islam have been bitter and life choking to Christianity. And yet, Wormwood is a medicinal purgative. Islamic beliefs stand as a stern judgment from the Lord against a God-dishonoring Antichrist church.

What led to this stern rebuke and judgment?

PERGAMOS A TYPE

To answer this we look at Pergamos. Pergamos was built upon an imposing conical hill that provided natural protection, strength, and elevation. This characteristic and the events linked to the Pergamos church make it reasonable to interpret that Pergamos as a picture of the elevation of the church by the state. This unholy union of church and state is called fornication (Rev. 2:14) and three parallel developments take place during the Pergamos period of the church.

- (1) Setting up the Trinity in place of God (325 AD)
- (2) Setting up the *daily* celebration of the mass, the Abomination which maketh desolate (5th century).
- (3) Setting up the Pope in place of Christ. (539 AD)

The prophet Daniel says much about the "Abomination which maketh Desolate," and Jesus, in Matthew 24:15, admonishes us to take heed to these words of Daniel. In Revelation 2:13, the message to the church in Pergamos speaks of the Papacy's rise in several ways:

- (1) The Papacy is Satan's seat.
- (2) Faithful Antipas or "Anti-Pope" is commended.
- (3) Balaam, the Assyrian who tried to sell the Lord's favor to the Moabite king Balak, is condemned. From Jude 11 and 2 Peter 2:15 we learn that Balaam's condemnation typifies second death.
- (4) The bishop's councils are the Nicolaitans, those who conquer, or lord over, the people. These are condemned and "hated" by our Lord.

Sad as these errors are, the full severity of the Lord's judgment falls upon the Pergamos church for directly violating the first commandment (Exodus 20:3): Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

The god-dishonoring doctrine of the trinity violates this commandment by setting up a threefold deity in the place of Jehovah. Islam views the trinity as idolatry. The beginnings of trinitarian doctrine go back to the time shortly after the apostles fell asleep. Slowly, the leaven of this doctrine began

IN THIS ISSUE

<i>A Star Called Wormwood</i>	1
<i>Wycliffe's Work</i>	6
<i>The Flood and the Days of Noah</i>	8

BEAUTIES OF THE TRUTH is published as a service to the brethren to stimulate their consideration and appreciation of the boundless riches of God's Word. It is published free of charge. Subscriptions will be entered for all who request it. Address all correspondence to: Beauties of the Truth, 6748 Breckenridge, Lisle, IL 60532. Editorial Board: Brs. Richard Doctor (Managing Editor), Carl Hagensick, Jerry Leslie, Raymond Luke, Michael Nekora, David Rice, Richard Suraci.

to corrupt the church. But, the Trinitarian controversy was a smoldering ember during a period of time when the church was undergoing very severe persecution from pagan Rome. All of this was to change during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine.

CONSTANTINE AND THE PERGAMOS CHURCH

The Pergamos stage of the church begins with the Roman emperor Constantine in 312 AD and it then continues to the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 AD. This is a very long period — a total of 488 troubled years. Constantine was the Roman Emperor who began the elevation of the church by the state which Pastor Russell treats this in Volume 2, page 332. He was a powerful and far-sighted emperor. Notice the grain ships of St. Paul's day were going towards Italy to support the burgeoning and frequently unprosperous-prosperous population who lived there. Constantine recognized that the future of the Roman Empire did not rest in defending an increasingly troubled European frontier that could not feed itself and was already under pressure from raids and frontier wars caused by the massive migrations of peoples such as the Vandals and Goths. Constantine also recognized that the future did not lay with fortunes of the decadent city of ancient Rome, nor did it lay with pagan religion and philosophy. What would he do?

By 324 AD he had made two very bold moves. First, he stopped the Roman policy of persecuting Christians, by issuing an edict of toleration (313 AD) this followed ten years of the most severe persecution of the church under Diocletian. This edict said that it was no longer a crime to be a Christian. Second, he moved the seat of government to Byzantium and founded a new capital that was to be a Christian capital.

Constantine wanted to establish a truly Christian empire untainted by paganism. Hence, he laid the foundations of a new city in an area that had been passed over for centuries because the military strategists since the days of Alexander the Great considered it unpromising for defense. In a display of pride, no other name than "Constantine's City," or in Greek "Constantinople," seemed suitable. Constantinople was not even located in Europe, but sits on the Asian side of the Bosphorus straits in modern day Turkey. Constantine's vision was a success by worldly standards and Constantinople was to thrive for over 1,100 years before falling to the Turks in 1453 AD.

EASTERN ORTHODOXY — ASSYRIA IN TYPE

What would crystallize into Greek Orthodoxy occupied the prosperous part of the empire for this "new Rome" was to be located where there was a dense and prosperous Christian population in the early 4th century. In this way it paralleled the ten tribes, led by Ephraim and Manasseh. This was to be a Greek-speaking part of the empire, with Latin relegated to musty legal proceedings. A quick tally of the advantages Constantinople held over Rome:

(1) No pagan temples, arenas, or circuses to testify to the non-Christian era and its persecution.

(2) In place of the Coliseum, pagan temples, and other unhappy memories was to be the Church of Holy Wisdom (St. Sophia was not a lady saint). For nearly 1,200 years, until the 1500's when St. Peter's in Rome surpassed it, St. Sophia was the world's largest church.

(3) The language of the New Testament was to be the basis of society.

(4) At least temporarily, the indolent and lazy population was not on the public dole clamoring for bread and entertainment.

(5) The Caesar was to have a fresh start with a "second Rome" and he had the "ordinance of God to keep everything in order on earth — even as it is done in heaven. In particular, he was under divine commandment to make certain that the Church was properly administered.

Hence, historians use the term "Caesaro-papism" to refer to this Melchizedek-like office of both priest and king, concentrated in the person of the Caesar. The Patriarch of Constantinople was a puppet of the state.

PAPACY ELEVATED

All of this maneuvering by the state in splitting the empire between East and West had the effect of strengthening the moral position of the Bishop of Rome. Without question, the bishop of Rome was the successor of a long line of martyrs; legend firmly holding that these bishops began with St. Peter himself. The bishop of Rome was to stand apart from such political control by the state and indeed with time he was to wrestle with the state for power. With the civil authority abandoning Rome to its own devices, the stage was set for the rise of the Papacy to take up the power vacuum.

As the East-West bickering got ugly, the church of the East completely fossilized and went off into their equivalent of the Assyrian captivity, *i.e.*, captivity from which there was never a recovery. There is an index finger in the message to Pergamos pointing us towards the hundreds of Old Testament prophecies regarding Assyria as a type. This index finger is the mention of Balaam's error. Balaam was a native of Pethor in Assyria. He traveled over 400 miles from his home at Balak's invitation so that he could curse and mislead the Israelites. The success of Balaam's evil counsel led to the introduction of idolatry, and the eventual downfall of the people. The ten tribes were led into captivity to Assyria and the two tribes to Babylon.

Antitypical Assyria is still with us, and figures prominently in end-time prophecies. While Constantinople — the seat of Greek Orthodoxy — fell 500 years ago, its spiritual heir is the Russian Orthodox Church. The spirit of Byzantium not only thrived in Czarist Russia, but it survived after the Russian Revolution in the Soviet Union. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union it has reemerged little worse for the wear in the tangible image of the double-headed eagle on Russian coinage of today. Let it be noted that the spirit of Byzantium strikes much deeper than the mint on coinage and we have yet to see all the ramifications of this emerge in these end times.



King Solomon in Royal Splendor

The Western church — antitypical Judah — followed the ten-tribe kingdom into captivity later, going off into captivity to Babylon in 539 AD. Because *the Bible narrative focuses on the forward movement of culture*, the Eastern Church moves off the scene of prophetic interest. There simply was no movement in the Eastern Church. There were no Waldos, no Wycliffes, no Luthers, no Penns, and no Russells as faithful witnesses in Eastern Orthodoxy to bring the church back to the living waters of the gospel.

THE NICEAN COUNCIL

Although Constantine did not officially become a Christian by the standards of that day, he called a general council of Christian bishops in 325 AD. We recall that the bishop's councils constitute the Nicolaitans whom the Lord hates. The bishops were to consider the controversy over the Trinity. Constantine recognized that a kingdom with one true emperor at its head needed one true religion at its helm. This council convened in Nicea, then a bustling and prosperous city located about thirty miles east of Constantinople.

Meeting in Nicea, and not Rome, only made sense. We must keep in mind that the Christian church was not as widespread among the marauding tribes of Vandals who were taking over Europe as it was among the settled city-dwellers in Asia and North Africa. So we find the chief disputers at the Nicean council were from modern day Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Libya, and Israel, not from Europe. The bishop of Rome got no mention whatsoever.

This Nicean council was to resolve the doctrinal conflicts about Jehovah and Jesus. Here was the question: Was Jesus in some way God, and a part of the trinity, or was he a sepa-

rate being, who had been created? The council was to adopt compromise wording that effectively endorsed the trinity. Jesus was declared to be *homo-ousios*, or consubstantial with God, a term which nobody really understood then or since. This ambiguity permitted the disputing parties to end the conference in peace with some sense of concord after the few dissenters led by Arius were disgraced, excommunicated and exiled.

PAGAN PHILOSOPHY EXALTED

The arguments used at Nicea and the Chalcedon councils that followed exalted pagan philosophy. The Greek word “hypostasis” (Strong’s number 5287) appears five times in scripture, where it is translated as “confidence,” “person,” “substance.” “Hypostasis” is never used with the baggage of pagan philosophy attached. This was an era when there was rioting amongst the women in Constantinople on market days over the Christian meaning of the word “hypostasis,” literally a “foundation” or “support.” This word appears frequently in the writings of pagan philosophers like Aristotle, and pagan philosophy gave “hypostasis” many new meanings. As time progressed, the arguments over the “hypostasis” of Jesus would become so confused in some churches that Jesus was considered only a materialization — like that of an angel. The unscriptural, god-dishonoring Trinitarian beliefs of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches do not go to this extreme. What an unloving era this had become, when there was violence and bloodshed over dogma and the use of words!

THE SPIRITUAL FAMINE

So, while barbarians swallowed up Europe, the civilized world of Byzantium was not much better off as far as the Lord was concerned. In general Byzantium prided itself on being both anti-intellectual and eager to believe in everyday miracles. Nazi-style library burnings took place during this era, and much knowledge from antiquity was lost. These attitudes lead to the spiritual famine promised in Revelation 6:5-6.

“And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, ‘Come and see.’ And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, ‘A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see that thou hurt not the oil and the wine.’”

Remembering our Lord’s parables, a penny was equal to a full day’s wages. During this famine, a full day’s work would purchase but one measure of wheat. That is barely enough on which to stay alive. The true church — like Elijah — moves to a place prepared for them by God in the wilderness where Revelation 12 supplies the details.

In contrast to famine, the joyful overcomers from Pergamos are promised feasting (Revelation 2:17). To them will belong the “hidden manna,” and the “white stone with their name written in it.” This “white stone” may be an allusion to the practice of granting the city’s heroes a white stone with their names written in it that would gain them admission to city



Solomon who sought wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:10)

banquets for the rest of their lives.

THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAM

Against the backdrop of a church thoroughly corrupted, Islam's sword cut like a bolt of lightning. Exploding from Arabia in 622 AD, in less than 90 years Islamic cavalry proceeded to conquer Syria, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Persia, North Africa and Spain. In short, they overran every church that was critical to the advancement of Trinitarian doctrine. To all the arguments about the trinity, Islam made one simple reply: "There is no God but God ..."

This message is ground into the ears of the near Eastern Christians, as they hear it sung publicly five times a day when the faithful of Islam are called to prayer. Islam finds the Trinitarian doctrine reprehensible, and considers Trinitarian belief to be idolatry. Sadly, when forced to drink the bitter medicinal purgative – Wormwood — waters of God's unity, the ability to objectively examine scripture perishes. Our hearts go out in sympathy to the testimonies relating to the persecution and martyrdom of Eastern Christians who live under Islamic rule. Yet, in the area of Trinitarian doctrine, they are even more closed-minded than Trinitarian believers typically encountered in the United States.

The bitter relationship of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam has led to recriminations from all three parties regarding who holds the clear picture of the God of Abraham. Some views within the Christian community consider Islam to be worshippers of a moon god (or goddess) because of the prominent use of the crescent moon in Islamic symbolism, and the focus of worship in Mecca on the Kaaba which houses an iron meteorite. Currently within the evangelical Christian community, Ramon Bennett (*Philistine: The Great Deception*, Shekinah Books Ltd., Citrus Heights, CA, page 46) states:

"Most Christians and Jews think that Allah is merely the Arabic name for God — the Creator God, the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob — the Holy One of Israel. This belief is the result of ignorance and is very dangerous because it simply is not true. Moslems even delight in ridiculing the God of the Jews who is also the God of Biblical Christians."

This is followed by a number of quotations about who Allah really is and each of these is matched back to the source of that quote. At the same time, these views have been publicized within the Islamic community and ridiculed as an example of Western ignorance of Islam's fundamental beliefs.

At the other end of the spectrum, there have been attempts at rapprochement that may have over-stated the case for Islam. For example, Abraham I. Katsch (*Judaism in Islam*, Sepher-Hermon Press, Inc., NY, 1980), an author fluent in Hebrew and Arabic, holds that:

"The *Shahadah*, or affirmation that there is no God but Allah, is the Islamic counterpart of the Jewish *Shema Yisrael*. Like Judaism, Islam does not recognize saints as mediators between the individual and his Creator. Like the Jews, the Muslim believes in the immortality of the soul and in personal accountability for his actions here on earth. Like Judaism, Islam denies the doctrines of original sin and salvation. And like the Jews, Muslims believe that each individual must follow a righteous path and secure atonement by improving his own conduct through sincere repentance."

Between these two extremes, the fairest course may be to acknowledge that despite deep divisions, all three major religions hold precious the God who called Abram from his idolatrous homeland and made with him a covenant.

MOHAMMED THE STAR CALLED WORMWOOD

The trumpets of Revelation seem to have a special significance showing what affect the church's spiritual triumphs and conflicts have on the world. In Revelation 8:10-11 text we read about the third trumpet and see a star, that is, a teacher in the "spiritual" heavens, falling from heaven, not upon the earth as we might expect, but upon the rivers, and fountains of waters.

This teacher is Muhammad, who, as a descendent of Ishmael, confessed Abraham as his father, and acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Servant of God, His Apostle, His Spirit, and His Word. But Muhammad went far beyond any Pope, setting aside both the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the Bible itself. In the place of the Bible, Muhammad offers his own set of revelations. Today these collected sayings — the Koran — run to approximately the length of the New Testament. It is the obligation of all Islamic schoolboys to memorize these.

Muhammad had great ambition. Were Muhammad's desire merely for political power, he might have been shown falling upon the earth. But his ambition was to alter the very lifeblood of the Jewish and Christian faiths — that is, the rivers and fountains of life in the Bible — and to do this at their very source in the Holy land.

O what a bitter draught of wormwood these waters became! To appreciate this bitterness, let us contrast Chris-

tianity and Islam in but a few practical lessons for daily life:

(1) The Bible teaches that God is our Father, and His son Jesus Christ justifies us. The Koran holds a more distant view of God as the creator, and each believer is a servant standing before God justified by his own works.

(2) The Bible teaches that God is Love. The Koran teaches that God is merciful and compassionate to Moslems; the rest will burn in Hell. Hell figures prominently and frequently in the teachings of Muhammad.

(3) Jesus taught that heaven was a place of fellowship, work, and growth in the knowledge of God. Muhammad teaches a garden setting for heaven, and lingers on descriptions of the lovely servant girls there.

(4) When Jesus was not accepted, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven on the unbelievers (Luke 9:54,55). Jesus turned and rebuked them. Muhammad taught his disciples to destroy unbelievers.

(5) Jesus taught that they who take up the sword should die by the sword. Muhammad taught that taking up the sword was the religious duty of his disciples.

(6) Jesus taught that the place where God is worshipped matters little. His disciples must worship in spirit and in truth. Muhammad taught his followers to pray towards an exact location — the Kaaba in the city of Mecca.

(6) Jesus taught that all men are neighbors. Muhammad taught that all believers are neighbors.

We could cite many other examples of the contrasts between Christianity and the teachings set forth by Islam. To their credit, Islam endorses good morals and maintains that charity towards the less fortunate is the duty of those who profess belief. It would be unfair to not acknowledge that Islam preaches these, and many other good things. Islam has an historical record of being tolerant, particularly towards the Jews. Civilization owes a number of fundamental advances in math, astronomy, and science to Islam's period of flowering. But let Muhammad be judged from his own words, and we quote from the Koran:

“Who is more wicked than a man who invents a falsehood about Allah or denies his revelations? Truly, the evildoers shall not triumph” (Sura *Jonah* 10:17).

For our part, let us never undervalue the simple lesson that “God is Love,” that we are his children, and that he is our Father and that our atonement depends on Christ Jesus. As we view the misery of the church in Pergamos, our Lord's words of loving compassion found in Isaiah 57:18-21, seem fitting:

“I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near saith the Lord; and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace saith my God, to the wicked.”

While humanity's passions sweep back and forth like waves on a troubled sea, Christians consecrated to God's

service have the privilege of standing on the Sea of Glass. We, like our heavenly father, must take a God-like perspective on a godless and self-willed world where a close walk with our savior will keep us in Jehovah's perfect Peace.

— *Richard Doctor*

Wycliffe's Work

John Wycliffe's life is summarized in the Columbia Desk Encyclopedia as follows. “1328-1384, English religious reformer, educated at Oxford. He boldly asserted that Christ is man's only overlord, that the clergy should own no property; that the Scriptures are the supreme authority; that many Church doctrines (notably transubstantiation) were false. His teachings were spread by his “poor priests” and influenced John Huss. He brought about the first translation of the Bible into English. Condemned as a heretic in 1380 and 1382, he was not molested.”

We might clarify this last comment. He was brought before the Bishop of London the first time but escaped church trial as the court session was terminated by rioting before he could be interrogated. At the second hearing he was protected by the queen mother and public opinion and was not sentenced. One significant part of this summation is the comment that Wycliffe had refuted the God-dishonoring doctrine of transubstantiation. To the church this was a blow, for this doctrine was the backbone or foundation of many of its more important teachings, which included the mass.

Doctrine, in relation to the life of Wycliffe, is the principal aspect that we will be considering, doctrines that he believed, and doctrines which he challenged and opposed.

You may have noticed in the Columbia summary that he was the first to translate the Bible into English. This was done directly from the Latin Vulgate, and not from the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts as later translators used. The main reason for this may have been that he did not have access to any of these manuscripts. Since he had studied Latin at Oxford, and had been an outstanding student, this would have been the most accessible work available to him.

MORNING STAR

Wycliffe is called the “Morning Star of the Reformation.” He was thus named as a result of his activities in the early reformation movement against Papacy.

Wycliffe, after completing his schooling, took an exceptional interest in the study of religion. At the age of 24 he had reached the conclusion that justification was by faith and not by works as required by the church. The impetus of his work began as a result of a schism that had occurred in the church. This was when two Popes took position at the head of the church, one at Rome, the other at Avignon. The succession of papal authority did not call for two to be reigning at the same time, and this caused no end of confusion among the lower echelon of the church. They did not quite know to whom they should be subservient or loyal. Both “holy sees” were issuing conflicting and opposing orders. The civil pow-

ers seized this opportunity to free themselves from the yoke of bondage that had held them in restraint. This was specially true in France.

BREAK BETWEEN ENGLAND AND ROME

The immediate cause of a break in English-Papal relations came when Pope Urban insisted that England resume paying a tribute of 1000 marks to the church. Since this payment had been ignored for some 33 years, Urban insisted that payment be made in full of that which was in arrears. Edward III refused, declaring himself resolved to hold his kingdom in freedom and independence, which the previous monarch had not dared to do. The parliament and the people sympathized with the king. This is the point where Wycliffe entered the picture. He was one of the King's chaplains, and Edward appointed him to answer the argument. So effectually did he prove that canon, or Papal law, had no force when it is opposed to the Word of God, that the Papacy from that day onward ceased to lay claim to the sovereignty of England.

In the year 1372 Wycliffe was raised to the theological chair. This was an important step, for now, being a Doctor of Divinity, he had the right to deliver lectures on theology, and this he did to the students at Oxford, mainly, but in addition, he preached in all the churches in England. The fame of Wycliffe as a defender of truth and liberty spread throughout the land. The Pope and the cardinals feared him, and minutely watched his proceedings. On the other hand, the King and Parliament entertained so high an opinion of his integrity and judgment as to consult him in matters pertaining to church and state.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

In our opening citation from the Columbia Encyclopedia, mention was made of Wycliffe's denunciation of the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. We are all familiar with the explanation of this erroneous doctrine from our studies in Volume Three. Although Wycliffe disputed the power of the priests to convert the two emblems into the actual flesh and blood of Christ, he had a problem with Scriptures such as "take, eat, this is my body." Also, statements of our Lord such as found in John 6:53, "except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." All the reformers with one accord denied this dogma of the church, together with the associated doctrine of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. But the reformers did not agree among themselves as to what was the truth on the matter. Wycliffe was no exception. He tended to believe more toward "consubstantiation." That is, in the Lord's supper, the bread remains bread and the wine remains wine, but that by means of the consecrated elements, the true natural body and blood of Christ are communicated to the recipients. Thus it differs from transubstantiation in that it does not imply a change in the substance of the elements.

The best words that Wycliffe could use were those of Jesus in John 6:56, "he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." However, in his

treatise, *Triologus*, he cites Christ's admonition to understand the "abomination of desolation" as applied to the defiling of the sanctuary in Daniel 11. Taking away the "continual sacrifice" and setting up the "abomination of desolation" he applies to the doctrine of transubstantiation, which he calls "this heresy about the host."¹

Transubstantiation was never adopted by the Church of England, in any formal document. In their articles of faith, 1571, it reads, "Transubstantiation, or the change of substance, of bread and wine in the supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of the sacrament and hath given occasion to many superstitions."² Thus we see the influence of Wycliffe, two centuries later, that all teachings should be proved by the Holy Scriptures, a "thus saith the Lord." In denouncing the doctrine of the church, he called the mass a disastrous error. Since the miraculous process performed by the priest, and only by the priest, was the central necessity of the religious system, and enhanced the importance of the priestly order; the view that this sacrament was a mere eating of bread and drinking of wine, as a personal remembrance of Jesus did away with any particular need for a consecrated priest at all. The struggle which Wycliffe opened with Rome became speedily a struggle for what one would call a rational or layman's religion, which was an appeal to the free intelligence and free conscience in mankind, against an authoritative, traditional, ceremonial and priestly religion.

SALVATION BY FAITH

During his early years, in his studies of the Latin Vulgate Bible, Wycliffe came to the conclusion that grace or salvation was free and obtained by faith and not by works as was taught and required by the church at Rome. Apparently all the reformers came to this same conclusion, either at the outset of their work or early into their mission. Scriptures such as "by grace are ye saved" convinced those reformers of the error of the church system, which required that salvation could only be obtained through works, and those works through the church. Wycliffe taught of the utter worthlessness of all human merit in the matter of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Note also the first part of the next verse 9, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Paul reiterates this thought in his letter to the Romans, where he wrote in 11:6, "If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." As members of the human race we were incapable of doing any work which our Father could accept. We were dead, corrupt and under condemnation as children of wrath. Our present standing, therefore, is not the result of anything we have done or could have done but only through God's mercy and grace.

Wycliffe, Huss and others attacked the system of medieval Christianity in some of its principal features and those beliefs became the fundamental tenets of the Protestant reformation which included those doctrines and beliefs in free grace. From a strictly technical point of view, we know that

Scriptural texts which teach free grace belong to the Millennial age. The term being used here, in reference to Wycliffe and other reformers, is justification by faith.

ANTICHRIST

Wycliffe, after a study of Grostete's writings, became convinced that the Pope was the Antichrist. Grostete was a 13th century theologian known principally as the precursor of the Protestant Reformation. He was noted for his strenuous and bold resistance to the corruptions of the Roman church in England and to the vices of the Papal court at Rome. Like Wycliffe, he studied and obtained a chair at Oxford. His criticism of the church was confined to working within that church structure.

We know that the Antichrist, or man of sin, is not merely a single individual as Grostete and Wycliffe believed, but a system of religious thought. The Apostle John uses this expression, Antichrist, some four times in his three short epistles. Let's merely consider one, 1 John 4:3. "Every spirit that confeseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come." By the time those early English reformers had come on the scene, Papacy had reached the pinnacle of its power and authority and was indeed the Antichrist. Wycliffe regarded the Pope, in bloodstained garments at the high altar of the central church of Christendom, as the Man of Sin, the Little Horn of Daniel 7, the woman of Revelation 17, and his treatises are replete with such references. During the papal schism, we find that both Popes were calling each other Antichrist as well.

Wycliffe identified the four prophetic empires of Daniel 2 and named them, Assyria or Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia and Rome. Then in the seventh chapter he applied the Little Horn of the fourth beast to the papal Antichrist, as the lawless, persecuting one. Here is Wycliffe's clear depiction.

"Why is it necessary in unbelief to look for another Antichrist? Hence in the seventh chapter of Daniel Antichrist is forcefully described as a horn arising in the time of the fourth kingdom. For it grew from [among] our powerful ones, more horrible, more cruel, and more greedy ... Therefore the ten horns are the whole of our temporal rulers, and the horn has arisen from the ten horns, having eyes and a mouth speaking great things against the Lofty One, and wearing out the saints of the Most High, and thinking that he is able to change times and laws."³

Wycliffe recognized the last week of the Seventy Weeks prophecy of Daniel and taught that Christ was crucified 3½ years after his baptism in Jordan. He used the day-year concept to interpret some of the other time periods of Daniel. He was certain that the "judgement day" was at hand in his day. This was not only because of his prophetic studies but because of the devastating pestilences and earthquakes that had swept Europe. He took these cataclysms to indicate that the great designs of God were hastening toward their close, and believed that the final visitations were soon to take place. We should not fault him for this. If the 1260, 1290 and 1335

days began in our Lord's day, they would end in Wycliffe's time. If the 1335 days had started in AD 33, they would end in 1368.

NUMEROUS CHARGES

Wycliffe's assertions regarding Papacy were numerous. One of his attacks was upon the spiritual domination of the priesthood. He pointed out that in the early church there had been but two ranks of clergy. He opposed the existence of multiple ranks of the priesthood. He spoke out against the necessity of auricular confession, that is, spoken directly into the ear, audibly. He doubted the practice of confirmation and extreme unction. He advocated a simpler form of church worship patterned after that of the early church. He taught that papal decrees had no validity except so far as they may be founded upon the Scriptures. This appeared to be his chiefest argument, for he kept repeating and repeating that all church dogma had to be proved by the Holy Writ.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

We would like to just touch on one of Wycliffe's great accomplishments, the translation of the Bible into English. This had the effect of bringing home the Word of God to the unlearned, to the lower classes. His adversaries accused him of making the Gospel "common." Let's complete this accusation, "Has made the Gospel common, and the more open to laymen and to women who can read than is wont to be, and to clerks well learned and of good understanding; so that this pearl of the Gospel is scattered and is trodden under foot of swine." The Bishops attempted to get the version condemned by Parliament, "lest it should become an occasion of heresies."

One of England's statesmen, in defense of the writing said, "England would not submit to such a degradation of being denied a vernacular Bible. The word of God is the faith of his people, and though the Pope and all his clerks should disappear from the face of the earth, our faith would not fail." The attempt at prohibition failed and the English Bible spread far and wide throughout the land, being diffused chiefly through the efforts of the "poor priests."

We see in the life of Wycliffe, as with the other reformers, a rigid conscience guided by the Holy Scriptures, and a fearless determination to attack the errors and wrongs of the establishment. They all knew what the dire results would be to go against the church. Wycliffe escaped this fate because of the condition that had been generated by the schism in the church. Other reformers were not so fortunate. But before the church could regroup, and attempt to persecute Wycliffe, the humble Christian, the bold witness, the faithful preacher, the able professor and the great reformer had passed off the scene of history.

—John Trzyna

(1) Froom, <i>Prophetic Faith of our Fathers</i> , Volume II, Page 58. Fisher, <i>History of the Reformation</i> , Page 148. Britannica, "Wycliffe," Page 823, 1959 Ed. (2) Britannica, "Transubstantiation," Page 526. (3) Froom, <i>Prophetic Faith of our Fathers</i> , Volume II, Page 55.
--

THE FLOOD AND THE Genesis

1656 *Anno Mundi* (year of world)
Anno Hominis (year of mankind)

