

# Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints  
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages  
Volume 34, Number 4, December 2023

## How 535-542 AD Changed the World

### Introduction to the Dark Ages

Occasionally, a natural event has a dramatic effect on the world. Recent discovery shows how it shifted power from Constantinople back to Rome.

A catastrophic volcanic eruption in 535-536 AD made 536 and 541 the worst years for trees in the past two millennia.<sup>1</sup> The effects were worldwide, as told by writers in Italy, Constantinople, and China. Sulfate spikes appear in arctic ice cores for the mid-sixth century, which pinpoints volcanoes as the source. One report said the sky was darkened for a year and a half, with the sun appearing for only about four hours each day. The air was clouded with fine ash worldwide; the earth would have been colder, and evaporation of water much less, producing dry air and less rainfall. Hence, there were very poor growth conditions for trees and crops.

One result was the Justinian plague in 541-542 AD (bubonic plague; fleas spread it only at <25°C). In Asia, Turkic cows fared better amid scarce food than Avar horses. So the Avars came west, due to the long-lasting drought, and enfeebled the Roman Empire and its capital of Constantinople in the East.

Kelts (Celts) in Western England and Ireland traded with Rome, which brought in the bubonic plague. As the Kelts shrank in West England, Anglo-Saxons came in from the east and became dominant. An excellent video about 536 AD is "The Year That The Sun Disappeared."<sup>2</sup> The history of the world, as recorded by Procopius, is outlined below.

### PROCOPIUS' HISTORY: CA. 539 AD

Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars* <sup>3</sup>

**V i 2** (Book V, chapter 1, verse 2) — Opens with the reign of Zeno in Byzantium (AD 474-491). Romulus Augustus, as a lad, becomes emperor in Rome (July 31, 475).

**V i 5-6** — Odoacer deposes Romulus Augustus (July 23, 476), Orestes killed (July 28, 476).

**V i 14** — King Theodoric/Ostrogoths drive Odoacer from Rome to Ravenna (489). Odoacer defeated and slain (493).

**V ii 2** — Justinian becomes East-Roman emperor in Constantinople (527). Volcanic eruption, spewing ash progressively into the upper atmosphere (535 February). Cold climate results in poor growth of trees, and almost certainly of crops (storage of old crops delays famine).

**V v 18** — General Belisarius conquers Sicily from King Gelimer/Vandals (December 31, 535).

**V vii 37** — End of 1st year of the Gothic Wars (536 Spring Equinox). Sun darkened through the year, another poor year for crops worldwide, hunger follows (536-537).

**V xiv 14** — Belisarius drives out Ostrogoths, conquers Rome (December 9, 536).

**V xvii - VI ii** — King Vittigis/Ostrogoths besiege Rome (537 Winter). End of 2nd year of the Gothic Wars (537 Spring Equinox).

**V xxv 13** — Belisarius deposes "chief priest," Pope Silverius, and replaces him with Vigilius (537).

**VI iii 1** — Famine and pestilence in Rome (537 Spring).

**VI x 13** — Ostrogoths lift siege of Rome and flee northward after 1 year and 9 days (538? Spring).

**VI xii 41** — End of 3rd year of the Gothic Wars (538 Spring Equinox).

**VI xiii 1** — Belisarius leaves Rome to pursue Ostrogoths (538 Summer Solstice).

**VI xxii 25** — End of 4th year of the Gothic Wars (539 Spring Equinox).

### IN THIS ISSUE

<i>How 535-542 AD Changed the World</i> . . . . .	1
<i>True Christians in the Middle Ages</i> . . . . .	2
<i>Gnostic Belief</i> . . . . .	6
<i>Joel 2:28, 29</i> . . . . .	7

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**VI xxix** — Belisarius subjects King Vitigis/Ostrogoths and their capital (Ravenna) (539/540).

**VI xxx 30** — Belisarius recalled, leaves Italy for Byzantium. End of 5th year of the Gothic Wars (540 Spring Equinox). Again, a poor year for crops worldwide (541).

**VII i 49** — End of 6th year of the Gothic Wars (541 Spring Equinox). Justinian plague (bubonic plague) in 541 and especially 542. Roman Empire (Constantinople) is weakened.

### HOW PAPACY CAME TO POWER

Interpretation: A pope could not have become a civil power until after East-Roman General Belisarius had driven out the Ostrogoths (who were Arian), and until Pope Silverius had been replaced (537 AD), nor likely until Belisarius had left Rome (538 Summer Solstice). But Pope Vigilius was in charge of Rome by the time Belisarius had tricked the Ostrogoths into submission and then left Italy altogether (540 Spring Equinox). While that leaves a span of 21 months during which Vigilius could have begun to exercise political power, a tentative date of about AD 539 should be approximately correct.

Later in the century, Pope Gregory I (590-604) “saw that Rome’s poor were fed and that the church fabrics of the city were repaired and maintained. He managed the estates of the church so successfully that their revenues were increased, but with humane treatment of those who cultivated their lands. He raised armies, kept Rome inviolate from Lombard attacks, negotiated with both Lombards and imperial officials, and on his own authority made peace with the Lombards. During his pontificate



*Belisarius, General of Justinian*

he was the outstanding figure in Italy, in its political as well as its ecclesiastical life. He ... insisted on the primacy of Rome, especially against the claims of the Patriarch of Constantinople.”<sup>4</sup>

One notes a parallel 1260 years later: French Gen. Berthier marched to Rome, entered unopposed on 10 February 1798, and, proclaiming a Roman Republic, demanded of the pope the renunciation of his temporal authority (he was near Florence in late February 1798). The pope then died in Valence, France, July 28, 1799; Papacy had been terminated! Napoleon hastily returned from Egypt, took power, and prevented the election of a successor until March 1800 — in Venice (far from Rome and outside French-occupied territory).

— Br. James Parkinson

(1) Editor’s comment: The source of the eruption has yet to be positively identified. “Michael Sigl, now of the University of Bern, found that nearly every unusually cold summer over the past 2500 years was preceded by a volcanic eruption.” His team identifies the source in the northern hemisphere. Gibbons, A., “Eruption made 536 ‘the worst year to be alive,’” *Science*, 16 November 2018, Volume 362, 6416, page 733. However, David Keys notes that ice cores from Antarctica also show evidence of a huge volcanic eruption in the mid-6th century AD. He finds that the volcano Krakatoa had a record catastrophic eruption in February 535 AD that was far greater than its 1883 eruption, which killed 36,000 people and is the greatest eruption in modern centuries.

(2) See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vbwyr5jLSUQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vbwyr5jLSUQ), 536 AD: “The Year That The Sun Disappeared.”

(3) Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, Loeb Classical Library, Volumes III and IV (Books V-VII), translator H. B. Dewing (1962, 1968).

(4) Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Harper & Brothers, New York (1953) pages 338-339.

## True Christians in the Middle Ages

*The Beliefs and History of the Albigenses*

**Editor’s Note** — The following contribution significantly updates the scholarship on the Albigenses found in the “Man of Sin” chapter of *The Time is at Hand*, Studies in the Scriptures, Volume 2. Departing from our usual literary style, the investigation of current scholarship by Bro. Timothy Krupa is based on visiting the Cathar Museum in Mazamet, France, and is told as an engaging first-person account.

Following is a quote from Studies in the Scriptures, Volume 2, pages 335, 336. “The Waldenses and Albigenses were the most numerous bodies of Protestants against Papacy; and when the literary awakening of the thirteenth century came, it was mainly from these that the truth shone out ... their doctrines, backed by simplicity and morality, shone out with the greater luster in contrast to the pompous pride and flagrant immoralities of the then exalted Papacy. ...

“Pope Innocent III first sent missionaries to the districts in which the doctrines of the Albigenses had gained foothold, to preach Romanism, work miracles, etc.; but, finding these efforts unavailing, he proclaimed a crusade against them and offered to all who would engage in it the pardon of all sins and an immediate passport to heaven without passing through purgatory. With full faith in the pope’s power to bestow the promised rewards, half a million men — French, German and Italian — rallied around the standard of the cross, for the defense of Catholicism and the extinction of heresy. Then followed a series of battles and sieges covering a space of twenty years. The city of Beziers was stormed and taken in 1209, and the citizens, without regard for age or sex, perished by the sword to the number of sixty thousand, as reported by several historians. The blood of those who fled to churches, and were murdered there by the holy crusaders, drenched the altars and flowed through the streets.

“Lavaur was besieged in 1211. The governor was hanged on a gibbet, and his wife was thrown into a well and crushed with stones. The citizens were without discrimination put to death, four hundred being burned alive. The flourishing country of Languedoc was devastated, its cities burned, and its inhabitants swept away by fire and sword. It is estimated that one hundred thousand Albigenses fell in one day; and their bodies were heaped together and burned.

“All this rioting in blood and villainy was done in the name of religion: professedly for the glory of God and the honor of the church, but really to uphold Antichrist, sitting in the temple of God [the church], showing himself that he is a god — a powerful one — able to conquer and destroy his enemies. The clergy thanked God for the work of destruction, and a hymn of praise to God for the glorious victory at Lavaur was composed and sung. The dreadful carnage at Beziers was accounted as the ‘visible judgment of heaven’ on the heresy of Albigensianism. The crusaders attended high mass in the morning, and proceeded throughout the day to waste the country of Languedoc and murder its inhabitants.”

### VARIED CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

The Christian experience was very different, depending upon when in the past 2000 years you happened to live. The period historians call the Middle Ages has recently had more light shed on that era’s Christian life. Documents have come to light giving a much-changed viewpoint of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus and to be living in that time period. It is both a humbling and enlightening experience to realize what these people went through.

I was recently exposed to the accounts of a group of Christians who lived from 1100 to 1200 AD, about 900 years ago. This was not a small group, but consisted of thousands of people spread over what today are multiple countries, mostly in southern Europe. There is an expression, “History is recorded by the victors.” One of the important things to remember is that the historical accounts that we have from this period of history are very likely inaccurate. The original histories we have of this group were written by the people who wanted them destroyed. We have what the persecutors want us to believe. We have been previously given accounts by the people who hated them and by the people who killed them. Since the 1950’s, new material, new records, new documents, have come to light. I want to start their story with the list of their beliefs, because that is what attracted my attention.

(1) They believed in one God. They did not believe in the Trinity.

(2) They based their beliefs on the scriptures and they were able to make a translation of the Bible into their everyday language.

(3) They did not believe in hell fire or eternal torment.

(4) They did not accept the idea of the Mass.

(5) The doctrine of transubstantiation was an anathema to them.

(6) They were basically in conflict with just about everything Papacy promulgated, including worshipping the cross, obeying the Pope, believing in indulgences, etc. They even rejected having buildings of worship.

(7) They did not believe in infant baptism. To them baptism was only proper for thinking adults.

(8) They were ardent believers in the workings of the holy Spirit.

(9) They favored the New Testament, and their favorite book was the Gospel of John. They doubted some of the New Testament cannon because the inclusion of these books was a decision made by the Papacy.

(10) They had no priesthood. Each congregation chose its own leaders, they had elders and deacons.

(11) Their daily behavior was so commendable that they were commonly called “the good men,” “the good women,” or “the pure ones [Cathars].” Those were not **their** chosen labels, but what other people saw in their behavior. And their behavior in almost all cases led to persecution and death by papal Rome.

(12) Each congregation was independent. There was no central governing body or lead bishop.

(13) Women were prominent in the group and in the gatherings. Likely the women were the actual majority.

(14) They were very willing to die for what they believed. They were tortured, thousands were burned at

the stake, but they chose that rather than succumb to the dictates of the Catholic Church. Records show that over 200,000 of these believers were killed by Papacy.

When I saw what they believed and how they lived, it became my opinion, that they were a group of consecrated Bible Students.

### WHAT ABOUT THE DIFFERENCES?

What beliefs listed above would we not be in agreement with? As stated earlier we have to always keep in mind the idea of “fake news,” or in this case, “fake history.” We have to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) and test especially the documentation by the Catholic Church. With that in mind, let us discuss some of the differences.

(1) One example would be their view on how a person receives the Father’s holy Spirit. Here is what they did. After an adult person was baptized in water, someone who had previously been baptized would lay his hands on this new person and the Spirit was then transmitted by the “Laying on of hands.” We do not do it that way, but we will acknowledge that the idea of “laying on of hands” is mentioned in the scriptures. Some good references are Acts 8, Hebrews 6:2, and 1 Timothy 4:14.

(2) Another difference is their observance of the Memorial supper. We observe it annually. They observed a weekly communion.

(3) Another difference is that they frequently preached abstention from marriage. I will leave that discussion for someone wiser than I.

(4) They also had “food rules,” and clearly the majority were vegetarians. I do not think the apostle Paul would have liked the food rules, judging by what he said to the Colossians and to Timothy.

(5) They were accused of some gnostic beliefs (see the article “Gnostic Belief” in this issue), but I am not sure how accurate or widespread that accusation really was. I think that is what the Catholic historians wanted you to believe to put these believers in a bad light. It is also frequently said that they believed in two gods. And we would agree there is a God, our heavenly Father, and there is a god of this world 2 Corinthians 4:4. Context is important and it is doubtful if we can fully understand every detail of their beliefs, especially given their large numbers.

(6) They were definitely confused on the resurrection. What they did perceive correctly was the need for an opportunity to reform after this life, but I am not thrilled with what they came up with in their understanding. I will repeat that their list of beliefs, that they clearly did subscribe to, absolutely amazes me.

### WHAT WERE THEY CALLED?

This group was a humble group and they did not create a name for themselves, simply calling themselves “the poor of Christ,” “apostles,” or “God’s Christians.” What is interesting is what other people called them. The initial



*Cathar Museum Mazamet, Southern France*

label they were given was “Arians,” then “Publicans, apostles of Satan,” and other pejorative labels. But one other name stuck with them, and it was quite respectful and scriptural. The Apostle Paul uses a word in his letter to the Colossians that means to be “pure.” This Greek word is “Cathar” (G2513). When Paul used this word, he chose to use it as a double negative, so he actually says “do not be **un**-pure.”

In health care you hear the expression, this medicine is a “cathartic.” That means it will clean you out. So, “cathar” means “pure,” “clean.” When their neighbors saw the daily behavior of these people, they acknowledged that these people were “pure,” and they gave them the nick-name of the “Pure people,” or the “Cathars.”

Additionally, they were also labeled for the city they came from, and Albi, in southern France, was one of their centers of activity. So frequently they were referred to as Albi-gen-sian’s.

### HOW DID THEY LEARN THESE TRUTHS?

We would hope that they had some connection to the **written word**. We wonder: did they have any access to the scriptures? The short answer is **yes**.

There are several ways this happened. First, there was a cultural history in their part of the world that had a strong connection to the scriptures. Could this have been the various translations of Wycliffe, Tyndale, or Luther, etc.? No — all of these translations that we are familiar with were by men who lived hundreds of years after this group of Christians. However, there was a translation made in the 300’s AD. I am not sure why we do not hear more about this, because it had to be one of the earliest, common language translations of the scriptures. It had a profound effect on the people that lived in this **same**

geographic area that years later the Cathars inhabited.

This is the story of Ulfilas. He was born in Asia Minor, present day Turkey, and educated as a Christian. As a young man he was sent to Europe as a Christian missionary. He did his missionary work with the people known as the Goths — “Goths,” as in Gothic architecture, etc. Remember, this was in the 300’s.<sup>1</sup>

Ulfilas converted these people to Christianity. He was amazingly effective. So much so that the entire nations of the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths were considered Christians. You might remember that the Romans called these people Barbarians. But, none the less, they were Christians.

The point here is that Ulfilas, in the 300’s AD, created for these people a translation of the Bible into their common language. This took place in the same geographic territory where the Cathars would live 800 years later. It was a cultural influence of being oriented to the scriptures. Additionally, both groups, Goths and Cathars, were Arians!

### **WHAT ELSE COULD HELP THEM WITH THEIR BELIEF SYSTEM?**

We have the above-mentioned heritage of the Gothic scriptures initiated by Ulfilas. Secondly, as the Cathars grew in size, the Catholic Church reacted strongly. The first label of Arians was quickly switched to “Heretics.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the first approaches to subdue the Cathars was that Papacy enlisted the services of the monastic order of the Dominicans. The Dominicans were famous for their militaristic approaches to everything. But their brutality and physical attacks on the Cathars actually backfired. A large number of Dominican monks resisted the strong-armed approach and left the Dominican Order and joined the brotherhood of the Cathars. This group of former monks brought into the Cathar brotherhood a group of relatively well-educated Christians, a group familiar with the scriptures.

This specific influx of educated monks added to the Cathar understanding and literacy of the scriptures. Records show that a number of this group were fluent in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew, in addition to their native language, Occitan. It was not the Pope’s intention, but this involvement of the former Dominicans strengthened the academic belief system of the Cathars. It helped them get closer to the written word.

The next step, in helping these people develop their belief system, was the translation they made of the scriptures. This happened in the early 1200’s. They focused primarily on the New Testament, and the records say that their favorite book was the Gospel

of John. This Bible and other of their writings are currently preserved in the French city of Lyon.

So, to the question, “did these people have any access to the written Word?,” the answer is **yes**. Their access had to be limited, especially in comparison to what we are blessed with in our times. But for that time period, it was remarkable.

### **BUT WAS THIS ENOUGH?**

The majority of these people were illiterate. But is it possible that there was one more thing that could bring them to the level of understanding they demonstrated?<sup>3</sup>

We are drawn to the words of Jesus. Something he said on his last evening with his disciples. As we read these words, keep your mental vision on these groups in southern Europe, most of whom could not read, but they were ardent believers.

In John 14:26 Jesus said, “in my name, the Father will send you” (and I want to use the Greek word here) “the *parakletos*.” Jesus continues, “the *parakletos* ... is the holy Spirit. The holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will be your teacher and will teach you all things.”

The Cathari may have been illiterate, with minimal leadership, surrounded by all the evils of the papacy, but they had beyond a doubt the *parakletos* right at their sides, guiding them. They threw out the Trinity doctrine, the mass, and big cathedrals. They would not worship the cross, nor transubstantiation, and observed no infant baptism. The apostle John, who recorded what Jesus had said that evening in his Gospel, later wrote about this subject again in his first epistle. In 1 John 2:27, it is as though he is quoting Jesus. “The holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will be your teacher and it will teach you all things.”

This is the most important part of our story. In the midst of the dark ages, in the midst of illiteracy, in the midst of the caldron of evil fomented by Papacy, these people had so much of the truth. My conclusion is that they got it because the Father’s Spirit was standing right along side of them.

### **WHAT HAPPENED?**

What eventually happened to these people? From a human standpoint, it did not go well. They were the first major rebellion against the Catholic Church in Europe, and the church responded with great brutality. The Cathari were the reason for the creation of a special office within the Catholic Church that was named the Office of Inquiry. History has called this the Inquisition.

In 1184, Pope Lucius III sent bishops to southern France to track down



*Dominican Inquisitor presents his findings on the Cathars to Pope Gregory IX.*

heretics called Catharists. These efforts continued into the 14th Century. In 1231, Pope Gregory charged the Dominican and Franciscan Orders to take over the job of tracking down heretics. The use of torture was approved by Innocent IV in 1252.<sup>4</sup> Historians say a minimum of 200,000 were killed, and maybe it was close to a million people. This was truly a genocide. Most of them died by being burned at the stake.

In 1167, about 15 years before the inquisition was established, it is stated that the “Arians” of the regions surrounding Albi and Toulouse, in southern France, enjoyed an amazing amount of tolerance provided by the secular, anti-papacy authorities. They were allowed to preach and they even had public debates with the priests of the Catholic Church.

So in 1167, publicly and in complete security, they gathered in convention in Saint Felix, a small city between Toulouse and Albi. Brethren came from that area, also from northeastern France, from Champagne and Burgundy, from Italy, Lombardy, and one brother came from Constantinople. It must have been a wonderful gathering.

This story cannot be a depressing story. It is actually a story of the triumph of good people, God’s people, Christians who did what they were supposed to do. Let us be inspired by these brethren. Let us emulate their humility and courage.

— Br. Timothy Krupa

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(1) Editor’s note: Ulfilas is the Latin version of the Greek *Ourphilas*, meaning “Beloved of Heaven.” In German this became Wulfila. He was an Arian in his beliefs. For further reading there is a good biography written by a Trinitarian author who grudgingly respects Ulfilas: Charles A. Anderson Scott, *Ulfilas, Apostle to the Goths*, MacMillan and Bowes, Cambridge (1885).

(2) Editor’s note: In German, “Katharer” (Cathars) was switched to “Ketzer,” meaning “Heretics.”

(3) Editor’s note: An expanded consideration of this “most important part of our story” may be found in the author’s discourse at the New York Labor Day Convention, September 3, 2023.

(4) Editor’s note: Papal Bull Ad Extirpanda, see Nielson.

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Daniel Walther, “A Survey of Recent Research on the Albigensian Cathari,” *Church History*, Volume 34, Number 2 (June 1965), pages 146-177, Cambridge University Press.

Arno Borst, *Die Katharer*, Stuttgart: Hiersemann Verlag (1953) in German, pages 121f., etc. Arno Borst points out that there were two

kinds of Cathars: Radikalen (Radicals) and Gemässigten (Moderates), which historians mostly overlook. The Radicals believed there were two equal Gods, one good and one evil (page 154). “The Moderates suppose the generation of the Spirit from the Spirit and the Life from the life continues to the End of the World; only the Perfected need no more roam (the Earth); their souls await — and that is a western idea — in a Pre-paradise for the Last Day, which will decide between Good and Evil” (pages 168f.). It is often difficult to tell which group of Cathars is being accused, which makes it difficult to know how close to Bible Student teachings most of the Moderate Cathars were.

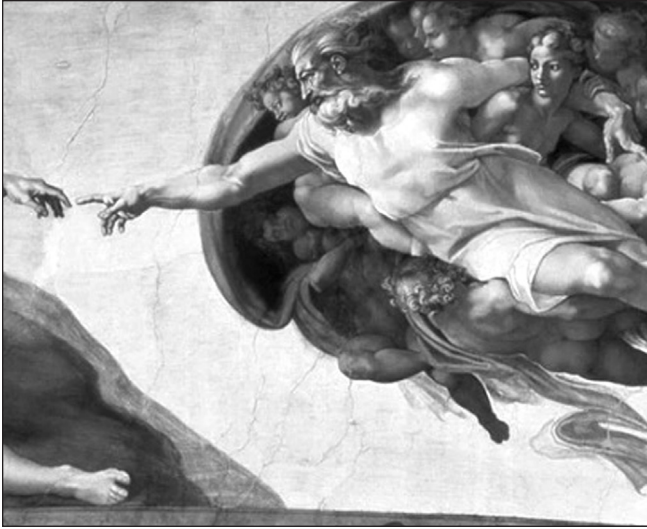
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## Gnostic Belief

*A background to Gnosticism, as an editorial adjunct to the previous article*

Shortly before our Lord’s birth, Gnostic belief emerged. It was a mixture of Judaism that was awed by Platonic Greek Philosophy but departed from both sacred Biblical text and Platonism. Gnosticism set forth a basic tenet of error — that all creation excepting the inaccessible divine creator was an amalgam of spirit and matter. They believed, that the greater the proportion of spirit, the closer to perfection. This issue is addressed in *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, Study X, Natures Distinct. In Gnostic belief, the God of Creation in the Bible was held to be ignorant, or worse. Salvation came by the Spirit’s direct revelation of knowledge (*Gnosis* in Greek), not by Jesus’ sacrifice. What follows is an abridged quote from Mircea Eliade, one of the 20th century’s leading scholars on comparative religion.

“**GNOSTICISM** was an outlook contemporary with early Christianity in which the common denominator is a particular set of myths. There is the myth of a female Trickster, the heavenly goddess Sophia (Wisdom) who produces the catastrophe or at least the unpleasant situation that leads to the creation of the visible world; and the myth of a male Trickster, the miscarried son of Sophia, who makes the world starting either from an ignominious substance called “Water” (from Genesis 1:6), or from litter or fragmented dreams fallen from on high, from the true God. This creator or fashioner of this world is usually identified with the Old Testament God. He is not unequivocally evil, except in a few testimonies; he is said to be ignorant, proud, and “mad” in a number of Coptic texts that are part of the collections of Gnostic codices, the largest of which was dug up in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in 1945. In testimonies pertaining to the gnosis of Valentinus (fl. 140-150), the ignorant creator repents and is pardoned for having created the world. Gnosticism is revolutionary insofar as it contradicts the two principles asserted both by the Bible and by Plato: the first principle according to which the world has been



Michaelangelo Sistine Chapel — God uses his left arm to hold Sophia (Wisdom) of Gnostic belief.

created by a benevolent and intelligent cause, and the second principle, according to which this world has been purposefully created for mankind and mankind has been created for this world. On the contrary, Gnosticism asserts that the creator of the world is bumbling and ignorant, so that consequently the world is bad, and human beings are superior to both the world and its creator for being endowed with a spark of Spirit stemming from the distant and good Father of the divine emanations. The goal of the Gnostic is thus to escape from the prison of the world.”

“Gnosticism most often used Christian materials, and its Redeemer is usually called Jesus Christ. His function is to reveal to adepts the existence of the spark of Spirit enclosed in their souls, which is at the same time the eternal *gnosis* [knowledge] that would allow them to ascend beyond the cosmos to the realm of divine plenitude. This Jesus Christ does not generally have a physical body, and consequently he could not have suffered and died on the cross. Interpretations of his passion and death are extremely varied. In some cases someone else (Simon of Cyrene) is crucified in his stead, while the true Savior stands laughing in the shadow of the cross. This mocking smile of Jesus directed toward the blind demiurge [creator] and his henchmen has certainly no correspondent whatsoever in the gospels.” (Mircea Eliade and Ioan P. Couliano, *The Eliade Guide to World Religions*, Harper Collins Pub., San Francisco, 1992, Section 9.2.)

Eliade, while accurate, does not sketch out what believers found attractive in Gnosticism. Most Gnostics were not scholars and receiving, as they believed, direct divine inspiration, they felt untethered to the written word. A more detailed picture can be gained by a short quotation from a contemporary Gnostic:

“The theme of the many writings identified as “Gnostic” is as follows: In a time before time, there was no thing, only an overarching Unity, or light. Differentiation occurred,

shattering the wholeness of the light into fragments, which fell through many levels of increasing density and created in their wake every quality of good and evil and every form. Eventually coming down to this world, the fragments of the divine light hid themselves as tiny sparks in the souls of human beings. Gnosis entails an awareness of the spark within, and Gnostic writings tell of efforts to bring about an awareness of this inner mystery. The tasks of one who has *gnosis* are threefold: to reveal the inner spark (which we here interpret as consciousness of the divine Spirit within the human being), to release it from the bonds of this world, and to return it to the world of light. There it is to be reunited with the All in a new way, for through suffering and travail consciousness may enter into the community beyond time and space.” (June Singer, *A Gnostic Book of Hours*, Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco, 1988, page xx.)

— Br. Richard Doctor

## Joel 2:28,29

The interpretation of these two verses is, at the very least, difficult! As we will discern, Bro. Russell is likely the only interpreter to grasp the layout and prophetic sequencing within these verses. Jewish translations (and a very few gentile ones) begin Joel Chapter 3 with the verse we have as 2:28. This includes: Soncino Tanach (Stone), Tanach (JPS), Leeser, New American Bible (R.C.), Jerusalem Bible (R.C.), New Jerusalem Bible (R.C.), Green Interlinear Bible, Fenton.

This shows clearly that these translators realize the power of the word “after” (2:28 or 3:1) is strongly dependent on the material in the verses which come before. This is so much the case, that the rabbinical comment in Soncino (3:1) says: “afterward — In the Messianic Age” — in other words, after the restoration of Israel in the verses just before. The Jewish Bibles are attempting to draw attention to the significance of Joel 2:28 as a “new beginning” by devoting an entirely new chapter to it. In this respect, the rabbi agrees with Bro. Russell, whereas most Christian commentators insist that this verse applies to Pentecost.

### INTERPRETIVE DETAIL

There is good reason to place verse 28 in the Messianic Age. Since the verse begins with “afterward,” we must place 2:28 after the restoration of Israel which is detailed just before 2:28. There seems no possible justification for doing otherwise. Thus, “afterward” tells us in no uncertain terms that 2:28 is a Millennial Age application. The difficulty, of course, is in proving that verse 29 is a Gospel Age text. This will not be difficult once we examine the facts with care. But first, looking at more detail in 2:28 will be helpful.

There is what we must consider a *marvelous* translation of 2:28 in Bro. Meggison’s notes on Joel. Unfortunately, he gives no attribution. It occurs also in Sr. Lenfest’s “A Helping Hand” book entitled *The Minor Prophets*. She also gives no attribution. Whether it is she or Bro. Meggison who first quotes the translation is unknown. Where it comes from is a mystery. But it is so excellent. It does [in brackets] have interpretive comments added — although the translation is so convincing that no interpretive additions are needed. It reads as follows:

“Your young men shall see the glorious visions [of Restitution blessings, etc., in process of fulfillment] of which your ancient men dreamed [the things respecting which they vaguely hoped and dimly understood and greatly longed for].”

We hope this is accurate, but no translation examined offers such a lovely solution. Nevertheless, the verse does not depend on this translation. It is merely helpful in understanding what the words of Joel may actually mean. As they stand in most translations, they do not contradict the prophetic interpretation we are using. They merely add to the number of questions we might have!

#### JOEL 2:29

No translation helps to confirm Bro. Russell’s teaching that 2:29 applies to the Gospel Age. We must all admit that, as Joel wrote it, we must struggle to make the switch from the Millennium in 2:28 to the Gospel Age in 2:29.

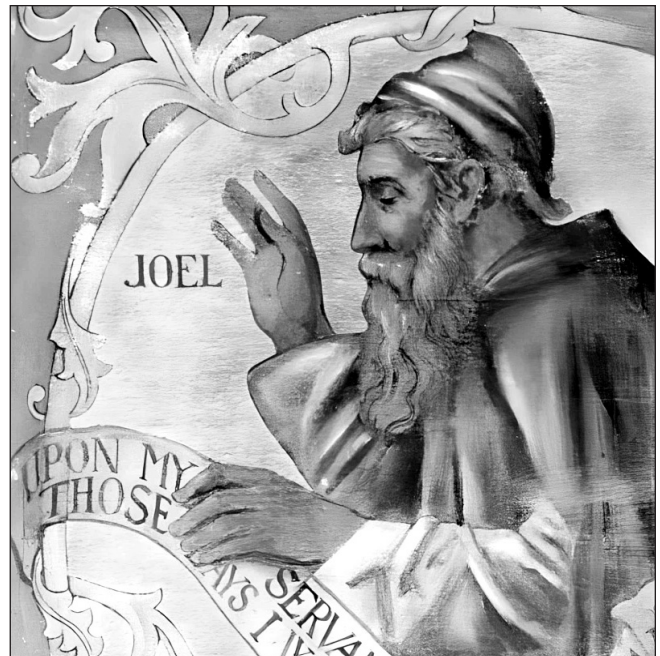
We frequently rely on the fact that 2:28 says either “after those days” or “afterward.” Then we point out that 2:29 says “In those days.” We must instinctively know that this is not the strongest of arguments! Nearly all people who read would say that “In those days” means “in the days that verse 28 just spoke of.” As far as language is concerned, they would have a point! So we need, as good Bible students, to have a much more secure reason for saying that “In those days” is not the Messianic Age.

We *can* find such a reason — a very powerful and Scripturally undeniable reason!

Once we see our proof, we will see that the true interpretation of 2:29 is secure even while it is obscure — a combination which the Lord really seems to like in order to baffle the wisdom of the wise while He blesses the saints who know that He rewards those “who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

#### THE PROOF

An initial point might well be made here before we examine the indisputable proof. Verse 29 (depending on translation) refers to “servants” and “handmaidens.” No one seems to have come to the realization that in the Kingdom, mankind will not be divided into people plus their Servants! All will be equal! This is the first “clue” that placing verse 29 in the Millennium seems faulty. Servants or handmaidens applies, as Br. Russell teaches,



*The Prophet Joel*

to the servants of the Lord during the Gospel Age — that is us.

Here is how we prove that 2:29 is a Gospel Age text: Peter **says so!** When Peter quotes Joel in Acts 2:14-21, he says, in no uncertain terms, that the Pentecost baptism of the holy Spirit fulfills the Joel text. Now, we know that Pentecost does not fulfill Joel 2:28. How do we know that? Because 2:28 is about the Millennium after Israel has been restored. (The context showed us that.) Therefore, some part of Joel does have its fulfillment at Pentecost. But it is not 2:28. What’s left? Joel 2:29 is left! So Peter, the inspired Apostle, now in possession of, and inspired by, the holy Spirit, has informed us beyond all doubt (in other words, as a proof) that Joel 2:29 applies to the Gospel Age.

There we have it! Joel shows that 2:28 is after the restoration of Israel (the Millennium), and Peter shows us that Joel 2:29 has its fulfillment beginning at Pentecost (the Gospel Age). The result is that Bro. Russell is correct.

— Adapted from a note by Br. David Doran

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An editor suggests another manner in which the Joel passage may refer first to the Gospel Age (Pentecost forward), and later to the Messianic Age. The passage may have one application following the First Advent, and another application following the Second Advent. Joel 1:4 speaks of four waves of Assyrian judgments against Israel, namely by the Assyrian kings Tiglathpileser, Shalmaneser, Sargon, and Sennacherib. All four of these appear in the scriptural history of Israel, in Kings, Chronicles, and Isaiah. These four waves are referred to again in Joel 2:25. It may be that Joel 2:28-32, cited by Peter in Acts 2:17-21, applies to the opening of the Gospel Age, after the literal threats by Assyria had long since passed. And that the passage has a later application to the opening of the Kingdom, after four invasions against Israel in modern times — 1948, 1967, 1973, and the time of Ezekiel 38.