

# *The Antichrist and the Protestant Reformation*

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**Protestants there are, but Protestantism is no more." --Alexander Vinet**

The Protestant Reformation in the 1500's literally changed the course of history. It helped bring Europe out of the Dark Ages, and led to the rise of true religious freedom. Its original principles, although not always followed, eventually found expression in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. When it comes to religion, the governments of earth have no right to control the conscience. True Protestantism teaches salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8), and the supremacy of the Bible above the visible church (2 Timothy 3:16) - above traditions, pastors, priests, popes and kings (See D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation of the Sixteen Century, book xiii, chapter vi, pp. 520-524). It also teaches the priesthood of all believers (2 Peter 2:9, 10), declaring that all people everywhere can be saved by coming directly to our loving heavenly Father through His only Son, Jesus Christ (John 14:6). "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

What did the major Protestant Reformers teach about the Antichrist? Whether you agree with them or not, it is important to realize what they actually taught. The following quotations are not intended to foster any personal ill will toward any human being, for this would be contrary to teaching of Jesus Christ (John 13:34, 35), but rather to simply present what some of the most influential Christian leaders who have ever lived actually believed about "the little horn" (Daniel 7:8), "the beast" (Revelation 13:1), and "the man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) - about the Antichrist.

**Martin Luther (1483-1546) (Lutheran):** "Luther ... proved, by the revelations of Daniel and St. John, by the epistles of St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. Jude, that the reign of Antichrist, predicted and described in the Bible, was the Papacy ... And all the people did say, Amen! A holy terror seized their souls. It was Antichrist whom they beheld seated on the pontifical throne. This new idea, which derived greater strength from the prophetic descriptions launched forth by Luther into the midst of his contemporaries, inflicted the most terrible blow on Rome." Taken from J. H. Merle D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation of the Sixteen Century, book vi, chapter xii, p. 215.

Based on prophetic studies, Martin Luther finally declared, "We here are of the conviction that the papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist." (Aug. 18, 1520). Taken from The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, by LeRoy Froom. Vol. 2., pg. 121.

**John Calvin (1509-1564) (Presbyterian):** "Some persons think us too severe and censorious when we call the Roman pontiff Antichrist. But those who are of this opinion do not consider that they bring the same charge of presumption against Paul himself, after whom we speak and whose language we adopt... I shall briefly show that (Paul's words in II Thess. 2) are not capable of any other interpretation than that which applies them to the Papacy." Taken from Institutes of the Christian Religion, by John Calvin.

**John Knox (1505-1572) (Scotch Presbyterian):** John Knox sought to counteract "that tyranny which the pope himself has for so many ages exercised over the church." As with Luther, he finally concluded that the Papacy was "the very antichrist, and son of perdition, of whom Paul speaks." The Zurich Letters, by John Knox, pg. 199.

**Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) (Anglican):** "Whereof it followeth Rome to be the seat of antichrist, and the pope to be very antichrist himself. I could prove the same by many other scriptures, old writers, and strong reasons." (Referring to prophecies in Revelation and Daniel.) Works by Cranmer, Vol. 1, pp. 6-7.

**Roger Williams (1603-1683) (First Baptist Pastor in America):** Pastor Williams spoke of the Pope as "the pretended Vicar of Christ on earth, who sits as God over the Temple of God, exalting himself not only above all that is called God, but over the souls and consciences of all his vassals, yea over the Spirit of Christ, over the Holy Spirit, yea, and God himself...speaking against the God of heaven, thinking to change times and laws; but he is the son of perdition (II Thess. 2)." The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, by Froom, Vol. 3, pg. 52.

**The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647):** "There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition that exalteth himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God." Taken from Philip Schaff's, The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes, III, p. 658, 659, ch. 25, sec. 6.

**Cotton Mather (1663-1728) (Congregational Theologian):** "The oracles of God foretold the rising of an Antichrist in the Christian Church: and in the Pope of Rome, all the characteristics of that Antichrist are so marvelously answered that if any who read the Scriptures do not see it, there is a marvelous blindness upon them." Taken from The Fall of Babylon by Cotton Mather in Froom's book, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, Vol. 3, pg. 113.

**John Wesley (1703-1791) (Methodist):** Speaking of the Papacy, John Wesley wrote, "He is in an emphatical sense, the Man of Sin, as he increases all manner of sin above measure. And he is, too, properly styled the Son of Perdition, as he has caused the death of numberless multitudes, both of his opposers and followers... He it is...that exalteth himself above all that is called God, or

that is worshipped...claiming the highest power, and highest honour...claiming the prerogatives which belong to God alone." *Antichrist and His Ten Kingdoms*, by John Wesley, pg. 110.

**A Great Cloud of Witnesses:** "Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer; in the seventeenth century, Bunyan, the translators of the King James Bible and the men who published the Westminster and Baptist confessions of Faith; Sir Isaac Newton, Wesley, Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards; and more recently Spurgeon, Bishop J.C. Ryle and Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones; these men among countless others, all saw the office of the Papacy as the antichrist." Taken from *All Roads Lead to Rome*, by Michael de Semlyen. Dorchester House Publications, p. 205. 1991.

## *The Antichrist and the Counter-Reformation*

Modern Christianity has largely forgotten the importance of the Protestant Reformation, which took place during the 1500s. "The sixteenth century presents the spectacle of a stormy sunrise after a dismal night. Europe awoke from long sleep of superstition. The dead arose. The witnesses to truth who had been silenced and slain stood up once more and renewed their testimony. The martyred confessors reappeared in the Reformers. There was a cleansing of the spiritual sanctuary. Civil and religious liberty were inaugurated. The discovery of printing and revival of learning accelerated the movement. There was progress everywhere. Columbus struck across the ocean and opened a new hemisphere to view. Rome was shaken on her seven hills, and lost one-half of her dominions. Protestant nations were created. The modern world was called into existence" (H. Grattan Guinness, *Romanism and the Reformation*, p. 122).

For almost a thousand years, Europe had been ruled by the iron hand of Rome. Only a few Bibles existed then, and Christianity was largely permeated with superstition. Faith in Jesus Christ, heart-felt appreciation for His love, and a simple trust in His death on the cross, were almost unknown. The New Testament truth about grace, full forgiveness, and the free gift of eternal life to believers in the Son of God (Romans 6:23), had been buried under a mass of tradition. Then Martin Luther arose like a lion in Germany. After a period of tremendous personal struggle, Martin Luther began teaching justification by faith in Jesus Christ rather than through reliance on "creature merits," or any human works (Romans 1:16; 3:26, 28; 5:1).

Eventually, Luther turned to the prophecies. By candlelight, he read about the "little horn," "the man of sin," and "the beast," and he was shocked as the Holy Spirit spoke to his heart. Finally, he saw the truth and said to himself, "Why, these prophecies apply to the Roman Catholic Church!" As he wrestled with this new insight, the voice of God echoed loudly in his soul, saying, "Preach the word!" (2 Timothy 4:2). And so, at the risk of losing his life, Martin Luther preached publicly and in print to an astonished people that Papal Rome was indeed the Antichrist of Bible prophecy. Because of this dual message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ apart from works and of Papal Rome being the Antichrist, the river of history literally changed its course. Hundreds of thousands of people in Europe and in England left the Catholic Church.

"There are two great truths that stand out in the preaching that brought about the Protestant Reformation,' American Bible Commentator, Ralph Woodrow, reminds us, 'The just shall live by faith, not by the works of Romanism and the Papacy is the Antichrist of Scripture.' It was a message for Christ and against Antichrist. The entire Reformation rests upon this twofold testimony" (Michael de Semlyen, *All Roads Lead to Rome*, Dorchester House Publications, Dorchester House, England, 1991, pp. 202, 203). It has been said that the Reformation first discovered Jesus Christ, and then, in the blazing light of Christ, it discovered the Antichrist. This mighty, Spirit-filled movement, for Christ and against the Antichrist, shook the world.

In 1545, the Catholic Church convened one of its most famous councils in history, which took place north of Rome in a city called Trent. This amazing Council, consisting of numerous sessions, ended in 1563. One of the main purposes of this Council was for Catholics to plan a counterattack against Martin Luther and the Protestants. Thus the Council of Trent became a center for Rome's Counter-Reformation. Up to this point, Rome's main method of attack had been largely frontal - the open burning of Bibles and of heretics. Yet this warfare only confirmed in the minds of Protestants the conviction that Papal Rome was indeed the Beast which would "make war with the saints" (Revelation 13:7). Therefore a new tactic was needed, something less obvious. This is where the Jesuits come in.

On August 15, 1534, Ignatius Loyola founded a secretive Catholic order called the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits. Historically, we might compare this order to the Evil Empire in the classic Star Wars films. The Jesuits definitely have a dark history of intrigue and sedition, that's why they were expelled from Portugal (1759), France (1764), Spain (1767), Naples (1767), and Russia (1820). "Jesuit priests have been known throughout history as the most wicked political arm of the Roman Catholic Church. Edmond Paris, in his scholarly work, *The Secret History of the Jesuits*, reveals and documents much of this information" (*Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative*, by Robert Caringola. Abundant Life Ministries Reformed Press, 1991, p. 31). At the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church gave the Jesuits the specific assignment of destroying Protestantism and bringing people back to the Mother Church. This was to be done not only through the Inquisition and through torture, but also through theology.

At the Council of Trent, the Jesuits were commissioned by the Pope to develop a new interpretation of Scripture that would counteract the Protestant application of the Bible's antichrist prophecies to the Roman Catholic Church. Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), a brilliant Jesuit priest and doctor of theology from Spain, said, "Here am I, send me." Like Martin Luther, Ribera also read the prophecies about the Antichrist, the little horn, the man of sin, and the Beast. But because he worked for Rome, he came to

conclusions vastly different from that of the Protestants. "Why, these prophecies don't apply to the Catholic Church at all!" Ribera said. Then to whom do they apply? Ribera proclaimed, "To only one evil person who will rise up at the end of time!" "Fantastic!" was the reply from Rome, and this viewpoint was adopted as an official Roman Catholic position on the Antichrist.

"In 1590, Ribera published a commentary on the Revelation as a counter-interpretation to the prevailing view among Protestants which identified the Papacy with the Antichrist. Ribera applied all of Revelation but the earliest chapters to the end time rather than to the history of the Church. Antichrist would be a single evil person who would be received by the Jews and would rebuild Jerusalem" (George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956, pp. 37-38). "Ribera denied the Protestant Scriptural Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2) as seated in the church of God - asserted by Augustine, Jerome, Luther and many reformers. He set on an infidel Antichrist, outside the church of God." (Ron Thompson, *Champions of Christianity in Search of Truth*, p. 89). "The result of his work [Ribera's] was a twisting and maligning of prophetic truth" (Robert Caringola, *Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative*, p. 32).

Following close behind Francisco Ribera was another brilliant Jesuit scholar, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) of Rome. Between 1581 and 1593, Cardinal Bellarmine published his "Polemic Lectures Concerning the Disputed Points of the Christian Belief Against the Heretics of this Time." In these lectures, he agreed with Ribera. "The futurist teachings of Ribera were further popularized by an Italian cardinal and the most renowned of all Jesuit controversialists. His writings claimed that Paul, Daniel, and John had nothing whatsoever to say about the Papal power. The futurists' school won general acceptance among Catholics. They were taught that antichrist was a single individual who would not rule until the very end of time" (*Great Prophecies of the Bible*, by Ralph Woodrow, p. 198). Through the work of these two tricky Jesuit scholars, we might say that a brand new baby was born into the world. Protestant historians have given this baby a name - Jesuit Futurism. In fact, Francisco Ribera has been called the Father of Futurism.

Historicism is the belief that Biblical prophecies about the little horn, the man of sin, the Antichrist, the Beast, and the Babylonian Harlot of Revelation 17, all apply to the developing history of Christianity and to the ongoing struggle between Jesus Christ and Satan within the Christian Church, culminating at the end of time. Historicism sees these prophecies as having a direct application to Papal Rome as a system whose doctrines are actually a denial of the New Testament message of free salvation by grace through simple faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works. Historicism was the primary prophetic viewpoint of the Protestant Reformers. In direct opposition to Historicism, and rising up as a razor-sharp counter-attack on Protestantism, came the Jesuits with their viewpoint of Futurism, which basically says, "The Antichrist prophecies have nothing to do with the history of Papal Rome, rather, they apply to only one evil man who comes at the end."

Thus Jesuit Futurism sweeps 1,500 years of prophetic history under the proverbial rug by inserting its infamous GAP. The GAP theory teaches that when Rome fell, prophecy stopped, only to continue again right around the time of the Rapture. Thus the ten horns, the little horn, the Beast, and the Antichrist have nothing to do with Christians today. According to this viewpoint, how many prophecies were being fulfilled during the Dark Ages? None. Sadly, this view has been adopted by the majority of prophetic interpreters today.

## ***The Protestant Switch to a New Antichrist***

For almost 300 years after the Council of Trent, this Catholic baby (Jesuit Futurism) remained largely inside the crib of Catholicism, but the plan of the Jesuits was that this baby would grow up and finally be adopted by Protestants. This adoption process actually began in the early 1800s in England, and from there it spread to America. The story of how this happened is both fascinating and tragic. As I briefly share some of the highlights, I want to clarify that many of those whom I will mention were (and are) genuine Christians. But is it possible for a Christian to unknowingly become a channel for error? In other words, can a sincere Christian be used by both Jesus Christ and the devil? At first we might say, "Never!" but consider this. In Matthew 16, Jesus told Peter that God was blessing him as he shared his faith in Christ (16:15-17), and then, just a few minutes later, Peter yielded to temptation and Satan spoke through him (16:21-23)! This proves that a Christian can be used by both God and Lucifer, and all within a short space of time. I call this the Peter Principle.

"The Futurism of Ribera never posed a positive threat to the Protestants for three centuries. It was virtually confined to the Roman Church. But early in the nineteenth century it sprang forth with vehemence and latched on to Protestants of the Established Church of England" (Ron Thompson, *Champions of Christianity in Search of Truth*, p. 91). Dr. Samuel Roffey Maitland (1792-1866), a lawyer and Bible scholar, became a librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is very likely that one day he discovered Ribera's commentary in the library. In any event, in 1826 he published a widely-read book attacking the Reformation and supporting Ribera's idea of a future one-man Antichrist. For the next ten years, in tract after tract, he continued his anti-Reformation rhetoric. As a result of his zeal and strong attacks against the Reformation in England, the Protestantism of that very nation which produced the King James Bible (1611) received a crushing blow.

After Dr. Maitland came James H. Todd, a professor of Hebrew at the University of Dublin. Todd accepted the futuristic ideas of Maitland, publishing his own supportive pamphlets and books. Then came John Henry Newman (1801-1890), a member of the Church of England and a leader of the famous Oxford Movement (1833-1845). In 1850, Newman wrote his "Letter on Anglican Difficulties" revealing that one of the goals in the Oxford Movement was to finally absorb "the various English denominations and parties" back into the Church of Rome. After publishing a pamphlet endorsing Todd's futurism about a one-man Antichrist, Newman soon became a full Roman Catholic, and later even a highly honored Cardinal. Through the influence of Maitland, Todd, Newman, and others, a definite "Romeward movement was already arising, destined to sweep away the old Protestant

landmarks, as with a flood" (H. Grattan Guinness, *History Unveiling Prophecy or Time as an Interpreter*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1905, p. 289).

Then came the Scottish Presbyterian minister Edward Irving (1792-1834), the acknowledged forerunner of both the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. Irving pastored the large Chalcedonian Chapel in London with over 1,000 members. When Irving turned to the prophecies, he eventually accepted the one-man Antichrist idea of Todd, Maitland, Bellarmine, and Ribera, yet he went a step further. Somewhere around 1830, Edward Irving began to teach the unique idea of a two-phase return of Christ, the first phase being a secret rapture prior to the rise of the Antichrist. Where he got this idea is a matter of much dispute. In his investigative books, journalist Dave MacPherson provides strong evidence that Irving accepted this new doctrine as a result of a prophetic revelation given to a young Scottish girl named Margaret McDonald (*The Incredible Cover-Up: Exposing the Origins of Rapture Theories*, by Dave MacPherson. Omega Publications, Medford Oregon. 1980). Regardless of where he got it, the fact is, Irving taught it!

In the midst of this growing anti-Protestant climate in England, there arose a man by the name of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). A brilliant lawyer, pastor, and theologian, he wrote more than 53 books on Bible subjects. During his lifetime, Darby took a strong stand in favor of the infallibility of the Bible in contrast with the liberalism of his day. He became one of the leaders of a group in Plymouth, England, which became known as the Plymouth Brethren. Darby's contribution to the development of evangelical theology has been so great that he has been called The Father of Modern Dispensationalism. Yet John Nelson Darby, like Edward Irving, also became a strong promoter of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture followed by a one-man Antichrist. In fact, this teaching has become a hallmark of Dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism is the theory that God deals with mankind in major dispensations or periods. According to Darby, we are now in the "Church Age," that is, until the Rapture. After the Rapture, then the [seven-year period of Daniel 9:27](#) will supposedly kick in, and this is when the Antichrist will rise up against the Jews. In fact, John Nelson Darby laid much of the foundation for the present popular removal of Daniel's 70th week away from history and from Jesus Christ in favor of applying it to a future Tribulation after the Rapture. Thus, in spite of the positive features of his ministry, Darby followed Maitland, Todd, Bellarmine, and Ribera by incorporating the teachings of Futurism into his theology. This created a link between John Nelson Darby, the Father of Dispensationalism, and the Jesuit Francisco Ribera, the Father of Futurism. Darby visited America six times between 1859-1874, preaching in all of its major cities, during which time he definitely planted the seeds of Futurism in American soil. The child of the Jesuits was growing up.

One of the most important figures in this whole drama is Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921), a Kansas lawyer who was greatly influenced by the writings of Darby. In 1909, Scofield published the first edition of his famous Scofield Reference Bible. In the early 1900s, this Bible became so popular in American Protestant Bible Schools that it was necessary to print literally millions of copies. Yet, in the much-respected footnotes of this very Bible, Scofield injected large doses of the fluid of Futurism also found in the writings of Darby, Todd, Maitland, Bellarmine, and Ribera. Through the Scofield Bible, the Jesuit child reached young adulthood. The doctrine of an Antichrist still to come was becoming firmly established inside 20th-century American Protestantism.

The Moody Bible Institute and the Dallas Theological Seminary have strongly supported the teachings of John Nelson Darby, and this has continued to fuel Futurism's growth. Then in the 1970s, Pastor Hal Lindsey, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, released his blockbuster book *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This 177-page, easy-to-read volume brought Futurism to the masses of American Christianity, and beyond. The New York Times labelled it "The number one best-seller of the decade." Over 30 million copies have been sold, and it has been translated into over 30 languages. Through *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the child of Jesuit Futurism became a man.

Then came *Left Behind*. In the 1990s, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins took the future one-man antichrist idea of Hal Lindsey, Scofield, Darby, Irving, Newman, Todd, Maitland, Bellarmine, and Ribera, and turned it into "The most successful Christian-fiction series ever" (*Publishers Weekly*). Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, was largely theological, which limited its appeal, while *Left Behind* is a sequence of highly imaginative novels, "overflowing with suspense, action, and adventure," a "Christian thriller," with a "label its creators could never have predicted: blockbuster success" (*Entertainment Weekly*). The much-respected television ministries of Jack Van Impe, Peter and Paul Lalonde, and Pastor John Hagee, have all worked together to produce *LEFT BEHIND: The Movie*. The entire project has even caught the attention of the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, resulting in an interview of LaHaye and Jenkins on *Larry King Live*. The *Left Behind* books are now available on displays at WalMart, Fry's Electronics, and inside countless other stores.

Again let me clarify, I believe the authors of *Left Behind* and the leaders of these television ministries are genuine Christians who are doing their best to influence people for the Kingdom. God is using them, just like the Father spoke through Peter when he firmly confessed his faith in Christ (Matthew 16:15-17). Remember that Peter Principle. There is much that is good in *Left Behind* which God can use to influence people for Jesus Christ. But, in the full light of Scripture, prophecy, and the Protestant Reformation, something is terribly wrong. *Left Behind* is now teaching much of the very same Jesuit Futurism of Francisco Ribera which is hiding the real truth about the Antichrist. Through *Left Behind*, the floodgates of Futurism have been opened, unleashing a massive tidal wave of false prophecy which is now sweeping over America. Sadly, it is a false "idea whose time has come."



When most Christians look at the last 1,500 years, how much fulfilled prophecy do they see? None, because almost everything is now being applied to a future time period after the Rapture. As we have seen, this GAP idea originated with the Jesuits, and its insertion into the majority of 21st century prophetic teaching is now blinding millions of hearts and eyes to what has gone before, and to what is happening right now inside the Church. "It is this GAP theory that permeates Futurism's interpretation of all apocalyptic prophecy" (Ron Thompson, *Champions of Christianity in Search of Truth*, p. 90). In love and in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, someone should publicly appeal to the major prophetic television ministries of today to re-evaluate their positions. Hopefully, like noble ships with a new command from their captain, they will yet change their course.

Jesuit Futurism has now become like a giant, seven-foot, 400-pound boxer, with spiked gloves. With a seemingly all-powerful punch, it has almost knocked Protestant Historicism entirely out of the ring. "The proper eschatological term for the view most taught today is Futurism...which fuels the confusion of Dispensationalism. The futurist school of Bible prophecy came from the Roman Catholic Church, specifically her Jesuit theologians....However the alternative has been believed for centuries. It is known as Historicism" (Robert Caringola, *Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative*, p. 6). "It is a matter for deep regret that those who hold and advocate the Futurist system at the present day, Protestants as they are for the most part, are thus really playing into the hands of Rome, and helping to screen the Papacy from detection as the Antichrist" (*Daniel and the Revelation: The Chart of Prophecy and Our Place In It, A Study of the Historical and Futurist Interpretation*, by Joseph Tanner, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898, p. 16).

Who had the right theology - those who were burned at the stake for Jesus Christ, or those who lit the fires? Who had the true Bible doctrine - the martyrs or their persecutors? Who had the correct interpretation of the Antichrist - those who died trusting in the blood of Christ, or those who shed the blood of God's dear saints? Dear friend, the prophetic ideas of Jesuit Futurism are right now at war with the Protestant Reformation by denying its power-packed application of prophecy to the Vatican. "The futurist school of Bible prophecy was created for one reason, and one reason only: to counter the Protestant Reformation!" (Robert Caringola, *Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative*, p. 34). In fact, Jesuit Futurism is at war with the prophecies of the Word of God itself! And if that's not enough, consider this. Jesuit Futurism originated with the Roman Catholic Church, which makes it the very doctrine of the Antichrist! And when Christian ministries and movies like *A Thief in the Night*, *Apocalypse*, *Revelation*, *Tribulation*, and *Left Behind*, proclaim an Antichrist who comes only after the Rapture, what are they really doing? I shudder to even say it. Are you ready for this? They are sincerely and yet unknowingly teaching the doctrine of the Antichrist!

Now you know why truth has been left behind.

I appeal to you in the loving name of Jesus Christ, the Crucified One - Don't fall for it.

## *The Flames of the Martyrs Still Speak*

Concerning the Beast, the Bible says, "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (Revelation 13:7). Millions today apply these words to a future Antichrist who will supposedly make war on a group of "tribulation saints" after the Rapture. The fact is, this common interpretation mistakenly ignores over a thousand years of torture, bloodshed, and shame - all carried out in the name of Jesus Christ. The nightmare of the Inquisition, and the flames engulfing millions of so-called heretics and innocent martyrs, have largely been forgotten.

Turning away from popular fiction with its future imaginary Antichrist, we are about to look at the very real story of a real man who did in fact battle the Beast. This battle took place in the 1400s, during the time of the famous Roman Catholic Council of Constance, in Constance, Germany. The council met November 1, 1414 and continued until April 22, 1418. "The total number of the clergy alone present at the council, though perhaps not all of them all the time, was four patriarchs, twenty-nine cardinals, thirty-three archbishops, one hundred and fifty bishops, one hundred and thirty-four abbots, two hundred and fifty doctors, and lesser clergy, amounting to eighteen thousand. With the emperor and his train, kings, dukes, lords, and other nobles, the members were ordinarily fifty thousand. At certain periods of the conference there were as many as one hundred thousand present. Thirty thousand horses were fed, and thirty thousand beds were provided by the city" (Alonzo T. Jones, *Ecclesiastical Empire*, Review and Herald Pub. Co. Battle Creek, Mich.: 1901, p. 553).

The Council of Constance condemned the writings of John Wycliffe of England, who lived in the 1300s. Wycliffe taught at Oxford University and has been called, "The Morning Star of the Reformation." The movie, *John Wycliffe-The Morning Star*, was awarded the title of Best Film from the Christian Film Distributor's Association. Before Martin Luther, John Wycliffe protested against Rome, was the first to translate the Bible into English, taught salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, placed the Word of God above popes and kings, and openly declared papal Rome to be the great Antichrist of Scripture. The Council of Constance, more than forty years after Wycliffe's death, decreed that his bones should be literally dug out of his grave and publicly burned. His ashes were triumphantly thrown into a nearby brook. "This brook," says an old writer, "hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblems of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over" (T. Fuller, *Church History of Britain*, b. 4, sec. 2, par. 54).

John Huss of Bohemia read the writings of John Wycliffe and continued many of his reforms. After denouncing John Wycliffe, the Council of Constance summoned John Huss, condemning him to the flames. Jerome of Prague was a good friend of Huss, and in April of 1415, before the martyrdom of Huss, Jerome arrived at Constance, hoping to help his friend. Unfortunately, he was seized by friends of the pope, cruelly dragged through the streets in chains, and promptly thrown into a dark, miserable, rat-

infested dungeon. For almost a year, he was transferred from dungeon to dungeon. At last he was brought before the council. Before that vast assembly these false charges were read against him: "1. He was a derider of the papal dignity. 2. An opposer of the pope. 3. An enemy to the cardinals. 4. A persecutor of the prelates. 5. A hater of the Christian religion" (Fox's Book of Martyrs, Zondervan Pub. House: Grand Rapids, MichI.: 1926, p. 145). Jerome was then commanded to accept the Catholic faith or be burned at the stake.

Weakened by almost a year of horrible treatment, Jerome's faith wavered, and he agreed in some measure to submit to Rome. But after he was returned to his rat-infested cell, he saw more clearly what he had done. He thought about his friend John Huss, who had died in the flames. He thought about his Saviour, whom he had pledged to serve, who for his sake had endured the unspeakable nightmare of the cross. Before his decision to compromise he had found comfort amid all his sufferings in the assurance of God's favour; but now remorse and doubts tortured his soul. He knew that still other compromises must be made before he would be released, which could only end in his complete apostasy from the Bible and from what he now knew to be right. As he looked into the whiskered faces of those rats and felt cockroaches crawling around his toes, Jerome made his decision. He would no longer deny Jesus Christ.

Soon Jerome was brought again before the council, but now he was determined to boldly confess his faith and to follow his friend John Huss to the flames. He publicly renounced his former denial, and demanded, as a dying man, an opportunity to make his defence. "You have held me shut up three hundred and forty days in a frightful prison," he said, "in the midst of filth, noisomeness, stench, and the utmost want of everything; you then bring me out before you, and lending an ear to my mortal enemies, you refuse to hear me. . . . If you be really wise men and the lights of the world, take care not to sin against justice. As for me, I am only a feeble mortal; my life is but of little importance" (Bonnechose, *The Reformers Before the Reformation*, vol. 2, pp. 146, 147). His request was finally granted. In the presence of many judges, priests, and nobles of Europe, Jerome knelt down and prayed for the Holy Spirit to take over.

Jerome then gave an absolutely sizzling defence in behalf of the truth. Referring to John Huss, he declared, "I knew him from his childhood. He was a most excellent man, just and holy; he was condemned, notwithstanding his innocence. . . . I also am ready to die. I will not recoil before the torments that are prepared for me by my enemies and false witnesses, who will one day have to render an account of their impostures before the great God, whom nothing can deceive. . . . Of all the sins that I have committed since my youth, none weigh so heavily on my mind, and cause me such remorse, as that which I committed in this fatal place, when I approved of the iniquitous sentence rendered against Wycliffe, and against the holy martyr, John Huss, my master and my friend. Yes! I confess it from my heart, and declare with horror that I disgracefully quailed when, through a dread of death, I condemned their doctrines. I therefore supplicate. . . Almighty God to pardon me my sins, and this one in particular, the most heinous of all." Pointing his finger at his judges, he declared, "You condemned Wycliffe and John Huss. . . . The things which they affirmed, and which are irrefutable, I also think and declare, like them" (Ibid.).

His hearers were stunned! "Shut him up!" cried his enemies. "What need have we of further proof? We behold with our own eyes the most obstinate of heretics!" Yet Jerome stood unmoved, like a mighty rock amidst a hurricane. He then thundered back, "What! do you suppose I fear to die? You have held me in a frightful dungeon, more horrible than death itself. You have treated me more cruelly than a Turk, Jew, or pagan, and my flesh has literally rotted off my bones alive, and yet I make no complaint, for lamentation ill becomes a man of heart and spirit; but I cannot but express my astonishment at such great barbarity toward a Christian" (Ibid., pp. 151-153). He was then grabbed by his guards and hurried back to the rats and cockroaches.

He was soon visited in his cell and given one last opportunity to repent. Jerome responded, "Prove to me from the Holy Writings that I am in error!" "The Holy Writings!" said one of his tempters, "is everything to be judged by them? Who can understand them until the church has interpreted them?" Jerome replied, "Are the traditions of men more worthy of faith than the gospel of our Saviour?" "Heretic!" was the response, "I repent having pleaded so long with you. I see that you are urged on by the devil" (J. A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, b. 3, ch. 10). Thus Jerome, even though he was accused of being inspired by Satan, refused to bow down to the traditions of mere mortals. "The Bible and the Bible only," was his motto. There is a lesson for us in this. We may also be accused of being Lucifer-led when we turn away from human traditions, popular ideas, and common practices. But we should stick to "the Holy Writings," no matter what the cost.

Finally sentence was passed, and Jerome was led out to the very same spot where John Huss had yielded up his life. He went singing on his way, his face lighted up with joy and peace. His gaze was fixed upon Jesus Christ, the Maker of all life, so why should he fear death? Upon arriving at the place, Jerome once more knelt down to say a heart-felt prayer. He was then tied to a stake, and branches of wood were piled around his feet. When the executioner stepped up to light the fire, this holy martyr exclaimed, "Come forward boldly; apply the fire before my face. Had I been afraid, I should not be here." As the flames began to rise, Jerome prayed again. His last words were, "Lord, Almighty Father. . . have pity on me, and pardon me my sins; for Thou knowest that I have always loved Thy truth" (Bonnechose, vol. 2, p. 168).

Do we love the truth above tradition? Are we willing to stand for Jesus Christ and the Bible, no matter what the cost? Friend, Jesus loves each of us personally. Whether you are Catholic or Protestant, He loves you. He has a special place in His heart for you and your family. He gave Jerome the strength to stand up for what he knew to be right, and He will do the same for you.