

# *The History of the Christian Church*

The history of the Christian church is revealed by John, the Revelator, through inspiration of God through Jesus Christ. Revelation chapter 6 verses 1-11 provide a condensed, prophetic account of the chronicles of the Christian Church through the illusion of four-horsemen. The vision marks the time from Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven to the close of an epochal era in Christian History known as the Dark Ages. This study provides background to the study of ***The Rise of Christian Denominations***.

**White Horse Era (31AD-100AD):** Historically, Roman Generals rode white horses after a victory or conquest in war. This period of Christianity is marked as its heyday. The Disciples of Christ, including Peter and Paul, were led by the Spirit to successfully spread the gospel of Christ to the known world (Col 1:23, Acts 5:12-14). The white horse and garments speak of a pure faith, where there was one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph 4:5) and salvation was by grace, the free gift of God through Christ Jesus (Acts 4:12). Christianity grew by leaps and bounds. Acts 5:14; 9:31

**Red Horse Era (100AD-313AD):** God's enemy in an attempt to thwart the growth of God's Church invoked mass persecution of the saints. Starting with the Jews who rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah and expanding progressively with time to the Romans, religious persecution became an increasingly popular means to attempt to stamp-out the spread of the Christian Church. Using the agency of Pagan Rome under Decius (249-251AD) and the Great Persecution enacted by Diocletian (284-305AD), Christians were tortured and martyred for their faith in Roman coliseums and stadiums. Through public exhibition, followers of Christ were clothed in animals' skins and fed to lions and other wild animals; crucified, torn apart by *The Rack*, covered with pitch and burned at the stake, and subject to all forms of torture. This period of the Red Horse and horseman is a *Blood-Stained Era* for the church. The peace that covered the earth in the first era was being robbed by the atrocities of the second [Rev 6:4]. However, the quicker one was martyred; two more would step forward, bearing the cross of Christ and the testimony of truth. The simple faith and conviction of the martyrs did more to attract new believers than the preaching of the Apostles. A Roman writer, Tertullian wrote, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the gospel." The enemy's efforts to destroy Christianity helped to further the cause for Christ. Acts 20:28, 29

**Black Horse Era (313-538AD):** Black the opposite of white; the black horse is indicative of falsehood and a false faith. The enemy of God began a different attack on the church of Christ where he used influential men, once spoken of by Christ as "ravenous wolves" (Matt 7:15) to assimilate with the believers and promote false doctrines. The enemy of God chose to join His ranks since he couldn't beat them. In joining God's church, the enemy hoped to bring about the destruction of true faith by way of false doctrines; replacing God's commandments with the traditions of men, and instilling in the church a spirit of compromise. God's enemy, through the agent of the Roman Emperor Constantine and through the ploy of religious compromise, united a civically unstable and religiously divided Roman state (part-Christian, part-Pagan, and part-Judaic) at the expense of God's true faith. The once pagan Emperor's proclamation of conversion to the Christian faith in 313AD, with the support of politically minded more so than spiritually minded church bishops in Rome, was a pivotal event in the mass growth and popular

## ***Revelation 6: History of the Christian Church***

reception of Christianity, ushering in religious compromise within the church. The Apostle Paul, like Christ, warned of such savage wolves who from within the church would not spare the flock but would speak perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:28-30). Once despised, Christianity became *en vogue* as masses of pagans followed the Emperor's precedent through a flood of mock conversions. The church became flooded with converted "Christians" in name only, having no knowledge of doctrinal truth and still embracing their pagan dogmas and traditions. As a result, "Truth was cast to the ground" [Dan 8:12] and mass error seized the church. These errors included: the practice of idolatry through the adoration of saints, a throw-back of pagan idol worship (Dan 11:31); the attempt to change God's law (Daniel 7:25) commanding worship on the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), to man's proclaimed holy day, Sunday (venerable day of the sun), in supposed commemoration of Christ's resurrection, but actually an appeasement for recently converted pagans accustomed to worshipping on Sunday in honor of the pagan sun god. This move was also a means to separate contemporary worship practices from the "traditionally" despised Jewish and early Christian customs; heightened church hierarchy with the bishop of Rome in the office of the Pope; and the promotion of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, another common pagan dogma (Genesis 3:4, Acts 20:30, 31; Daniel 7:25).

**Pale Horse Era (538AD-1798AD):** The rider of the pale horse, Death, signifies the apparent demise of true religion and a resulting dead faith. This was an era of extreme spiritual darkness, also historically known as the *Dark Ages*. During this period, few traces of God's true church, based on teachings of Christ, His Apostles and God's laws were evident. The unification of church and state by God's enemy through the vehicle of Papal Rome created a religio-political power where opposition to the Church of Rome was punishable by civil law- the penalty commonly being imprisonment and death. The enemy of God had been successful in distorting the image of true godliness demonstrated in the works of the early church for a false, self-serving, self-exalting religion that was founded on man's dogmas, vices, traditions, and perversions of truth. By force, the title and authority of God's true church which was grounded in Jesus Christ and the Spirit inspired writings of the bible, were usurped by the Roman Papal See. The spirit of compromise (uniting Christ based religion with pagan practices) that began during the Black Horse Era pervaded the doctrines espoused by the Church of Rome. Paganism had so infiltrated the church that Christianity at the time has commonly been referred to as "Baptized Paganism". The era's "Dead Faith" brought spiritual heresies such as: Sunday sacredness in lieu of Sabbath worship; the institution of an exalted church hierarchy with the appointment of the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) by emperor Justinian in 538AD, above all other church officials, having both political and religious authority; the belief that salvation was dictated by the doctrine of the church rather than by the free, unmerited grace of God; the practice of indulgences (remission of temporal punishment through sacramental absolution [\$\$\$]); penance (confession to a priest and acceptance of penalties and absolution); the worship of images or idols through the adoration of saints; human dogmas versus the bible; infant baptism and the replacement of water baptism by immersion with water sprinkling. The few loyal followers of Christ, His remnant, who strove to preserve the faith of the first church

## ***Revelation 6: History of the Christian Church***

and adhere to the doctrines of Christ's apostles, were forced to flee to the hills where the earth provided refuge for them from the determined Roman See (Rev 12:6, 14-16). Those who sought to serve God in spirit and in truth while avoiding the corruption of the world through the church's apostasy took up residence in caves, in the high clefts of mountains and in the wilderness (Jude 3). When all appeared lost for the masses, bewitched by the doctrines of men; and lost for the cause of God's truth and church- those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev 12:17), God raised up men and women of faith who would begin a Holy Reformation in protest [Protestant Reformation] to the church's debased condition. As the sun slowly peers through the night sky, bringing light where once reigned darkness, God brought forth a remembrance of His lost truths. We see the remembrance of God's truth through the workings of the Reformation and ***The Rise of Christian Denominations***.