

## ***The Rise of Christian Denominations***

The following document provides a summary of the progression of God's enlightenment to mankind regarding the matters of His church during and after a 1,260-year period of severe spiritual darkness. The works of God through the *Protestant Reformation* and by the hands of the reformers who carried out great exploits (Dan 11:32), was given to bring light to the world, beclouded by men's dogmas during a period of history known as the *Dark Ages*. The era was made "dark" when self-exalting men removed general access to the bible, God's written Word, and replaced Christ-centered teachings with man-made, pagan traditions and rituals. The faith-filled reformers began a Protestant Reformation in "protest" to the traditions and formalities made commonplace under the world dominated Holy Roman Empire or Church of Rome. By seeking truth found only in God's holy writ, these protesters of papal apostasy sought to bring reform, and restore true religion to the masses. As the spread of darkness during the Dark Ages was progressive and pervasive, so God's enlightenment to the reformers was also progressive, occurring over the course of centuries and dispersed throughout the world. One reformer after another built upon the truths, long hidden, yet discovered by his predecessor until enlightenment of forgotten, cast-away, and neglected Christ-centered truths were fully manifest and the author of falsehoods was exposed. The work of God through the *Protestant Reformation* was to call out all sincere believers from the false teachings of Romanism to His true gospel message.

**Waldenses:** (also called Vaudois) Followers of Peter Waldo (12th Century French merchant and founder of the sect)- A sect of Puritan dissenters from the Church of Rome which arose about 1170 in southern France through the preaching of Peter Waldo; they were excommunicated in 1184 and persecuted, but survived by fleeing to the Alps of France and Italy. Through subtlety and prayer, Waldenses sewed portions of scripture into their clothing and shared their teachings in willing homes in order to educate people of apostate religious practices under the Catholic Church. The mountains offered a safe haven for these staunch Christian believers while under persecution by Rome (Dan 11:33); however the determination of the Roman See to stamp out this threat was overwhelming. Waldenses believed in poverty and austerity, public preaching and the literal interpretation of the scriptures as the sole authority of God.

**John Wycliffe** (c.1320 – December 31, 1384) was an English theologian and early proponent of reform in the Roman Catholic Church during the 14th century. He made an English translation of the Bible in one complete edition despite Catholic prohibition of the Bible. His body was posthumously exhumed by the Catholic Council of Constance in 1415 and burned with John Huss as a heretic.

**Hussians:** Followers of John Huss in the Czech Republic, these faithful Christians believed that obedience to God was man's highest calling. Huss' quote "My mind is chained by the bible" led to his martyred death on July 6, 1415 on the shores of Lake Constance following the Roman Church's Council of Constance (1414–1418). Huss began the bible revival in the Slovakian region.

**William Tyndale** (circa 1494 - October 6, 1536) was a 16th century religious reformer and scholar who translated the Bible into the Early Modern English of his day. Tyndale's translation was the first to take advantage of the new medium of print, which allowed for its wide distribution. In October 1536, he was killed by strangulation and then burned at the stake by the Church of Rome.

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**Lutherans:** The Protestant church founded by the once Roman Catholic theologian, Martin Luther (1483-1546), beginning the Reformation in Germany. Believed in Salvation by grace rather than man's feeble acts of penance to please or appease God. He published 95 thesis or reasons why church doctrine at the time was at err. Two of the most forceful and poignant of these thesis that were capstones of the Reformation movement were the teachings of "The bible and the bible alone" as the single source of inspiration for doctrine, reproof, for correction and instruction in all righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16) rather than the bible in conjunction with the traditions of man. The second key principle was that man is saved by grace and not by works, speaking contrary to the Roman doctrine of indulgences, penance, and other works in order to find favor with God. Luther's studies of Paul's writings in the books of Romans and Ephesians made it clear that salvation is founded and completed in the sacrificial working of the God-head (John 3:16; Eph 2:4,5,8,9; John 16:13,14). Luther's intents were never to abandon the Church of Rome which he loved but to bring needed reformation of the unscriptural doctrines he identified. He was however, excommunicated from the Catholic Church by Pope Leo X (Giovanni de Medici) in 1521 and thus founded the Lutheran faith. Lutherans taught the doctrine of Consubstantiation during communion, that Christ is actually present in bodily form in the taking of bread and wine. **Huldrych Zwingley**, the Swiss protestant reformer, later broke with Luther because of this doctrine, holding that the bread and wine were mere symbols.

**Calvinists/Presbyterians:** The Protestant followers of the French reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564) whose doctrines espoused predestination and salvation solely by God's grace. In his writing Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536) Calvin espoused the doctrine that our salvation was a gift of God, predestined to all mankind and is given by grace, challenging the doctrine of the Church of Rome that suggested that priests could grant pardon and remission from sins for those who followed their enforced formalities. Armed with the writings of Paul (Eph 1:3-8), Calvin helped to break the yoke of bondage, held by the Church of Rome on sincere Christians who offered their life and wealth to the Roman Church for the remission of sins through penance. Calvinists believed man should be armed with the Sword of the Spirit, the bible [Ephesians 6], as well as a sword of defense. Thus the writings of the U.S. Constitution, written by Baptists and Calvinists reflect these two principles where the *sword of defense* (US Constitution's Right to Bear Arms) will be used to defend the Sword of the Spirit (freedom of religion, by force if necessary).

**Anabaptists:** A sect that originated in Switzerland (c. 1522) who denied the Church of Rome's practice of infant baptism and practiced solely the baptism of adults. The sect understood that only those who were able to make a sincere, conscientious decision for salvation should be baptized.

**Puritans:** A religious group in England who through persecution later migrated to the Netherlands and the American colonies in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, desiring a greater reformation of the Church of England than that established by Elizabeth. In order to further purify the church of the elaborate ceremonies and forms, a carry-over of the Church of Rome, the Puritan creed was established stating,

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“to walk in all his ways, made known or to be made known to them”. Puritans, unlike prior reformers like Luther and Calvin, understood that the centuries that brought grave darkness to the church would require time and revelation from the Holy Spirit to dispel the same darkness, therefore they remained open to new or obscured and made known revelations of truth from the Word of God by His Holy Spirit. Puritan life was characterized by strict adherence to morals and religion that was imposed unanimously to all men; violating the freedoms of conscience that they themselves fled oppression to uphold.

**Baptists:** Roger Williams is noted for being the first in the America’s to promote freedom of conscience, where men were not to be compelled by state or church to worship God but rather possessed free will to worship or not, an inalienable right of choice for all men given by their Creator. For this doctrine, he was banished as an anarchist from the early Puritan settlements and was left to fend for himself in the wilderness of North America. Finding refuge among Native American tribes whose favor he won, he later traveled north and established the settlement of Rhode Island where freedom of conscience and religious freedom were key tenets. Williams is noted for founding the Baptist denomination holding that baptism should be given only to adult believers and those able to make a conscientious decision for Christ. In 1639, Roger Williams established a Baptist church in Providence, Rhode Island and John Clarke began a Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island. Baptists received their name for having deposed the Church of Rome's practice of baptism by sprinkling for the baptism by immersion demonstrated as an example to all future believers by Jesus Christ Himself (Matt 3:13-17; 28:19, John 3:5).

**Wesleyans:** Followers of John Wesley who espoused a balance of justification by faith and holy living. Believed that Christians should be distinct and separate in character, deportment, and actions than the world; Christ being the supreme example. Stressed Christian holiness and adherence to the commandments of God, a direct attack at the Antinomian teachings of the time promoting that “Christ had abolished the moral law, and that Christians are therefore under no obligation to observe it; that a believer is freed from the ‘bondage of good works.’ Others, though admitting the perpetuity of the law, declared that it was unnecessary for ministers to exhort the people to obedience of its precepts, since those whom God had elected to salvation would, “by the irresistible impulse of divine grace, be led to the practice of piety and virtue,” while those who were doomed to eternal reprobation “did not have it in their power to obey the divine law” (Ex 19:3-6; Lev 11:45; Deut 5:6-15, GC88 Ch. 14 - Later English Reformers).

**Methodists:** A name first used derogatively against the brothers Charles & John Wesley and those who sought forsook the Rome inspired doctrines of penance and works for the simple grace of Christ made know through their methodical study of scripture. The Protestant denomination that developed from the evangelistic teachings of the Wesley brothers, George Whitefield, and others in the first half of the 18th Century who were also the founders of an "Holy Club" at Oxford University, England (1729).

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**Seventh-day Baptists:** Small group of reform minded Baptist believers who through inspiration of the Holy Spirit studied the bible and received knowledge of the lost 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath. By 1844 the number of Seventh-day Baptists numbered approximately 6,000 members; by the turn of the century, their numbers were approximately 4,400.

**Millerite Movement (Adventism):** A religious movement raised-up by God and foretold by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 12: 4) where men would run to-and-fro through the bible and knowledge would increase. The movement which began in the early 1820's and extended through 1844 occurred simultaneously in North America [William Miller], South America [Manuel LaCunza], Europe [Johan Bengel, Edward Irving] and Australia. The movement occurred on the heels of the fulfillment of cosmic events in the skies and in space (Matthew 24:29, Revelation 6:12, 13), prophesied by both Jesus and the Apostle John that raised interests in bible prophecy and end time events. The Holy Spirit directed faithful Christians of various denominations [Baptist, Methodists, Presbyterian, etc.] to seek hidden truths in the prophetic books of Daniel and the Revelation. One prominent Adventist in North America, the Baptist minister William Miller, became known for his evangelistic seminars held throughout New England. Miller's seminars and that of other Adventist reformers were marked by a careful, meticulous study of bible prophecy found in the Old and New Testaments, but particularly the study of "End Time" events. Through diligent studies of the books of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, these Adventist believers came to the conclusion that Christ's Second Coming was eminent and would occur during the year 1844. The movement gained considerable nation-wide appeal in the year 1840 when Josiah Litch, another Adventist student of bible prophecy accurately predicted two years in advance, the fall of the Ottoman Empire to the day, August 11, 1840, based exclusively on time prophecy calculations found in Revelation 9. Time prophecies and the method of interpreting time prophecies (day/year principle) gained resounding interest and acclaim for the movement. Miller's time calculation of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 which speaks of the cleansing of the sanctuary was also 100% accurate to the day, however, the event he thought to be "the cleansing of the sanctuary" was incorrect. Miller interpreted the earth to be the sanctuary to be cleansed with fire at Christ's Second Coming in the prophetic timeline. The movement's sincere followers eagerly awaited and prepared for Christ's Second Coming by selling all of their worldly possessions and cleansing their hearts of sin for Christ's soon return. When Christ did not return on October 22, 1844 (the historic time prophecy miscalculation now known as the "*Great Disappointment*") it signaled an upset for the Millerite movement. For those who never truly embraced the prospect of Christ's return with sincere, heart-felt anticipation, this disappointment was the death knell of their faith and they became ardent scoffers of those who searched bible prophecy for truth. Others, however, whose faith were grounded in Jesus Christ despite the disappointment of not having seen His return, still felt conviction for many other truths brought to light by the movement, including other end-time prophecies and details of the beast powers revealed in the books of Daniel and Revelation. These believers continued to search the scriptures diligently for the cause of their miscalculation.

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**Seventh-day Adventists:** Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and undaunted by the disappointment of 1844, Adventist believers who continued studying the truths uncovered by the Millerites, discovered that the event of the "*Great Disappointment*" of 1844 was prophetically ordained by God as seen through the writings of John the Revelator (Revelations 10:9-11). When made aware of God's explicit detail of the bitter-sweet experience of the Millerite Movement, this encouraged the Adventist believers that their faith was not in error nor in vain, and propelled them to continue studying scriptures for truth. These faithful believers, heeding Christ's admonition of Rev 10:11 to "prophecy again to many peoples", continued to study the bible and sought greater truths in bible prophecy. Through guidance of the Holy Spirit, these Adventist pioneers were led to study the principles of the Old Testament sanctuary, and therein the actual meaning of the "cleansing of the sanctuary" in Daniel 8:14 was clarified. The sanctuary once thought to refer to the earth, neither referred to the earth, nor the former sanctuary temple in Jerusalem that lied in ruins for over 1774 years, but rather to the High Priestly ministry of Christ, now in the Holiest of Holy, the true sanctuary in heaven not made with men's hands (Hebrews 4, 5, 7, 8, 9). The symbolic cleansing of the sanctuary on the typical Day of Atonement for Ancient Israel, a symbol of judgment, prophetically met its anti-type and was revealed to have begun on October 22, 1844 (Daniel 8:14), rather than Christ's Second Coming as predicted by the early Millerites. This knowledge then gave understanding to the message of the three angels of Revelation 14 where the gospel is to be preached to all nations tongues and people, including the message of a universal judgment as reflected in the typical Day of Atonement of Ancient Israel; and a solemn warning to flee from the teachings of the apostate church, the whore of Rome. After reading a leaflet published by the Seventh-day Baptists in February 1845, Joseph Bates, the primary founder of the Seventh-day Adventist church, was convinced of the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath and began to preach the message. As more hidden truths were re-discovered through diligent bible studies, gifts of the Holy Spirit manifested through visions and dreams were given to one of the movement's pioneers, Ellen White, confirming and affirming the re-discovered truths and the progress of the movement, including: the biblical truths on the unconscious state of the dead as opposed to the common doctrine of an immortal soul; the High Priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary today; the universal judgment of mankind; messages on health reform and temperance, a message radical for its time; the Three-Angels message of Revelations 14; the doctrine of righteousness by faith; dress reform and holiness; and other apostolic, foundational truths. The teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist movement is God's prophetic, end-time, remnant (Rev 12:17, 1 Kings 19:18), bearing a specific message to the entire world at the end of time, just prior to Christ's return. Adventism speaks of the nearness of Christ's return and the need for adherents to be "repairers of the breach" (Isaiah 58), reformers in diet, dress, and lifestyle, essential for meeting the Holy God. The name Seventh-day is to direct all people's minds to the key end-time issue of worship that prophetically will divide the world. The gospel message; the call to worship the one true God of Creation by obedience to the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath; the message of righteousness by faith, the hallmark of the faithful throughout time; as well as preparation to meet a Holy God who has judged the earth and its inhabitants according to their works (Rev 22:12; 14:6, 7) are the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 that have inspired the movement. As stated in a fourth angel's message of Revelation 18:1-5, God is

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calling for all Christendom and humanity to return to the pure, bible based faith borne by Christ and His Apostles and to forsake the traditions and formalities introduced through a counterfeit system of worship. This last day message of "Salvation by Grace through Faith" speaks words of hope to a dying world while beckoning all who profess Christ's name to forsake the traditions of man (Mark 7:7). Men are to forsake traditions for the simple faith, governed by "what saith the Lord". The sign of true self denial and true faith will be reflected in one's humble willingness to trust God at His word, while believing and keeping ALL of His commandments, (John 14:15) including the seventh-day Sabbath (Ex 20: 8-11, Rev. 14:12, Rev. 12:17, Rev 19:10). The message of faith, of Christ's righteousness imputed to mankind, and of the death, burial, and new life in Christ through baptism for a one time sinner, is a message of man's complete victory over sin while yet here on earth through Christ Jesus, our Redeemer (Luke 18:27). The love of God for mankind; the restoration of the image of God in mankind through Christ, the 2nd Adam; righteousness imputed to those who believe unequivocally, is the gospel message that is to go to all the world, to be preached to all nations tribes, and tongues, then the end shall come (Matt 24:14).