

Lesson 3

THE MEDIEVAL (MIDDLE AGES) PERIOD

A.D. 600 – 1300

*“But evil men will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived...”
(2 Timothy 3:13)*

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. The Study of History is Profitable.

1. Old Testament writers appealed to history (Deut. 1-3; Psa. 78; Isa. 51:1-2).
2. Jesus (Mt. 12:40-42), Paul (1 Cor. 10:1-12), the author of Hebrews (Heb. 4:1-11), James (Jas. 5:17-18), Peter (2 Pet. 2:4-9; 3:3-5), and Jude (Jude 5-7) all appealed to history to make their point.
3. We follow their example and appeal to history to learn important lessons for the Lord’s church today.
4. It has been said: “Those who ignore history are destined to repeat it.” It has also been said: “All we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”

B. Why This Particular Study Is Profitable.

1. The rise of Islam is a major feature of this period of time.
2. The development of the Catholic Papal power over religion (Apostate Church) and politics (state) is a central feature of the medieval period. The formation of many Catholic practices and doctrines developed during this time that still exist today.

C. Understanding Some Terms.

1. The term “Medieval” is simply the Latin word for “middle ages” – a period running approximately from 600 to 1300. This age is in the “middle” between ancient history around the fall of the Roman Empire (before 600) and modern history around the time of the Renaissance (1300 to present).
2. The phrase “Dark ages” refers to the period of time in which the Catholic Church suppressed learning among the people. Few works of lasting literary value were produced during this time. The date 1300 marks the beginning of the period of the revival of learning known as the Renaissance. The “Dark Ages” are also “dark” because of the severe punishment granted by the Catholic Church during this time.

D. Growth of Christianity at the Beginning of the Seventh Century.

1. Christianity grows in the Celtic lands (Ireland, Scotland) and among the Anglo-Saxons (Britain), but they were divided over the question of when to observe Easter. The Synod of Whitby (663) ruled in favor of the Roman observance.
2. Christianity was taken to China by Alopen in 635 and his missionary acts are recorded in the Sian-fu Stone.
3. Christianity was taken to Croatia in 641.

II. THREATS FROM WITHOUT: ISLAM.

A. Mohammedism and Islam.

1. Doctrinal battles in the Churches of the East and frontier battles with the Persians in the East opened the way for the expansion of the new religion of Islam.
2. The prophet Mohammed was born c. 570 in Mecca and when he was 40 he formed a religion after marrying a rich widow named Khadijah (610 – 630). He believed in one God (Allah). He believed that Jesus was a great prophet, but not the Messiah. Mohammed believed that he was the last great prophet and his “revelations” superseded those found in the Bible. In 622, he fled from Mecca to Medina (the Hegira) because he was persecuted for his beliefs. This date marks the beginning of the Mohammedan calendar. Mohammed, a sensuous man with 14 wives and many concubines, died on June 8, 632. By 732, Muslims controlled Syria, Palestine, Persia, Egypt, most of Africa, and all of Arabia. Today, Islam is a major world religion.
3. The religion of Islam (meaning resign to the will of Allah) contains Five Articles (Allah, the last day, the angels, the Book of Koran, the Messengers) and Five Pillars (the Great Confession, the five daily prayers, the charity, the fasting, the pilgrimage to Mecca).
4. The Koran is the sacred book of Islam.
5. The Jihad (meaning struggle) includes Jihad of the sword (Quran 2:190-193, 216, 244; 4:74,77,84; 99:5,29; 22:78; 47:4-5; 49:15).
6. Islam soon advanced north and west. After the death of Mohammed, his followers took Damascus in 635, Jerusalem and Antioch in 638, Edessa in 641, Alexandria in 643, Armenia in 653, and Carthage in 697. They spread through North Africa and crossed over into Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar. They lost to Charles Martel in a battle between Tours and Poitiers in 732. But, the rapid advance of Islam at this time caused a deterioration of Christianity in the East.
7. Christians and Jews revolt against Moorish rule in Toledo (837). The Basilica of St. Peter in Rome is sacked by Muslim raiders (846). Pope Leo IV erects walls around Rome to defend against Muslim raids (847). Christians and Muslims war in the East (871 – 879). Christians and Jews are persecuted in Jerusalem under Egyptian Muslim rule (878).
8. From 1031 to 1094, Muslims who had been in control of Spain (Iberia) were slowly losing control in that area to Christians during the *Reconquista*.

III. THREATS FROM WITHIN: CATHOLICISM (WEST AND EAST).

A. Iconoclasm.

1. The popular practice of icon veneration in the West was challenged in the East by Emperor Leo III (717 – 741). In 726, Leo declared those who worshipped icons and images to be heretics and idolaters and he ordered all images destroyed in an iconoclastic purge of the Eastern empire.
2. Many did not welcome Leo’s edict of iconoclasm, especially the monks. Germanus (640 – 733) wrote three influential discourses in favor of icons. However, Leo continued to destroy icons. The Roman Pope Gregory III, denounced Leo and the iconoclasts at the Synod of Rome in 731.
3. In 753 at the Synod of Hieria, Constantine V, son of Leo, put down the pro-icon rebellion and reaffirmed the heretical and idolatrous nature of icons. Again, many monks refused the iconoclastic ruling and in turn were martyred.

4. After Constantine's son Leo IV ruled for five years (775 – 780), his wife Irene ruled (797 – 802). She attempted to reverse the iconoclastic policies of her predecessors and called for the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. Over 300 bishops gathered at this council and they soon reversed the decrees of Hieria. It was decided that icons could be respected and admired, but absolute adoration, on the other hand, would be reserved only for God. Simony (the practice of selling church offices) and other church abuses were also condemned at this council.
5. Emperor Leo V “the Armenian” (813 – 820) would lead a second great campaign against icons.

B. The Papal System.

1. Review Lesson 2, “The Papacy.”
2. The Catholic papacy gained strength during the Middle Ages. The Catholic Church ruled and dominated the minds of the people. Every area of life was controlled by the Catholic Church. The Papacy controlled both religion and politics. Some Catholic historians call this period, the “Age of Faith.” Any “faith” to be had or “truth” to be declared by an individual came from the Catholic Church.
3. The papacy was not only controlling but also corrupt. “Simony” (from Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8), the practice of buying religious offices, was very prevalent. Some popes also kept concubines with them. Here is a brief list of some of the more prominent popes during the Medieval Period:
 - a) Gregory II (715 – 731) sent Boniface to evangelize Germany. Boniface worked to reform errors and abuses in the Teutonic church through the Synods of Geranicum (742) and Soissons (743), and the Frankish clergy (747). In 746, Boniface was made the first archbishop of Mainz and in 754, he was martyred in Frisia. Christianity was also advanced in Germany through the rule of Charles Martel (690 – 741). Martel repelled the Muslim invaders in 732. King Charlemagne (768 – 814) set out to expand the Teutonic empire through wars and he also established schools of learning to promote the seven liberal arts: arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, grammar, logic, music, and rhetoric. His revival of learning was known as the “Carolingian renaissance”. Charlemagne's chief assistant in religious matters was Alcuin (735 – 804) who focused on educating Christian clergy, writing commentaries, and revising the Vulgate Bible.
 - b) Leo III (717-740) said “I am both priest and king.” He tried to rid the Church of icons and images, a controversy known as “Iconoclasm” (image-breaking). He issued an edict against icons, c. 726 – 730. He also appointed Charlemagne as Emperor in 800 beginning the practice of popes controlling kings. This act would lead to the creation of the Holy Roman Empire of medieval Europe.
 - c) Nicholas I (858 – 867) ruled with supremacy like Gregory the Great 254 years before him. He believed he should rule over church and state with unquestioned authority.
 - d) John VIII (872 – 882) inspired Slavic missions and Christianity made its way to Croatia, the Czechs, Moravia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Later in the 10th century, Christianity would come to Russia, Denmark, Poland, and Hungary. In the West, Christianity made its way into Scandinavia. Later in the 11th century, Christianity would come to Iceland
 - e) John XII (955 – 963) had a rule marked by worldliness and political intrigue with the German king Otto I. As a result, Otto was granted power over the papacy and he installed a number of popes from 973 to 999 without consulting the clergy.

- f) Sylvester II (999 – 1003) was the first Frenchman to become pope and he encouraged the spread of Christianity to Poland and Hungary.
 - g) Clement II (1046 – 1047) was the first German to become pope and he instituted strict measures to reform the papacy from corruption.
 - h) Hildebrand or Gregory VII (1073 – 1085) advocated papal absolutism and moral reform. He was a part of the Lateran Synod (1059) which set up the “College of Cardinals” to select a pope. After he became pope himself, he excommunicated King Henry IV of Germany for objecting to Gregory’s policies. He made Henry stand outside his castle in Canossa, Italy, for three days in the snow to show his penitence (1077). He believed that “he himself may be judged by no one” and “the Roman church has never erred, nor will it err in all eternity” (*Dictatus Papae* 16-22, ca. 1075).
 - i) Innocent III (1198 – 1216) held supreme power. He believed himself to be the “Vice-regent of God upon the earth” and “Vicar of Christ.” He believed the office of the Pope to be below God and above man, judge of all, and judged of none. He deposed King John of England and papal power reached its zenith under his rule. He stated that his authority was like the light of the sun, while the authority of the king was like the light of the moon. He also used the crusades to increase his power. He convened the influential Fourth Lateran Council (1215) which established the doctrine of the Eucharist and transubstantiation.
 - j) Gregory IX (1227 – 1241) formalizes the Inquisition against heretics and sends missionaries to Mongolia.
 - k) Innocent III (1246) made agreements with the Russian Daniel Romanovich which led to the formation of the Eastern Rite Catholic Church in Russia (Russian Orthodox Church).
 - l) Boniface VIII (1294 – 1303) continued the power of Gregory VII and Innocent III. This period of history has been called the “Golden Age of Roman Catholicism.” His papal bull (Latin, *bull*a, referring to a lead disk seal on an important document) of 1302 called the Unam Sanctum: “*That there is one holy Catholic and apostolic Church we are impelled by our faith to believe and to hold – this we do firmly believe and openly confess – and outside of this there is neither salvation nor remission of sins ... We, moreover, proclaim, declare, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.*” Boniface was refused by King Philip of France and died after his arrest and imprisonment by Philip. The papacy began to decline in power after the time of Boniface VIII and his death marks a turning point in the history of Christianity.
4. Papal power reined over individual Catholics through an ingenious system of control. The individual was controlled by: a) the Parish Priest who teaches locally and administers the sacraments; b) the Rural Dean, a parish priest who controls other priests; c) the Vicar General, a bishop who controls the Rural Dean and the Parish Priest; d) the Bishop who rules over the Rural Deans and the diocese of parishes; e) the Archbishop who rules over all the Bishops in the dioceses of a nation; f) the Papal Legate who controls all the Archbishops; and g) the Pope who controls everyone under him. The Pope is selected from a College of Cardinals (Latin, *cardo*, meaning “a hinge”).
5. Legends of “saints” and supernatural miracles were also prominent during the Medieval Period. Reverencing icons of popular “saints”, prayers to “saints”, and pilgrimages to homes of “saints” were also common practices.

6. Many doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church were developed at this time:
 - a) 600 - prayers conducted to Mary.
 - b) 709 - kissing of the Pope's foot.
 - c) 755 - instrumental music.
 - d) 786 - worshipping of images and relics.
 - e) 850 - use of Holy Water.
 - f) 995 - canonization of dead saints (you may now pray to them).
 - g) 1079 - celibacy of the priesthood.
 - h) 1090 - rosary (prayer beads instituted).
 - i) 1215 - transubstantiation (the wafer becomes the literal flesh of Jesus and the wine the literal blood of Jesus).
 - j) 1229 - Bible is forbidden to the laymen.

C. The Monastic Orders.

1. Review Lesson 2, "Monasticism."
2. Monastic establishment and reform was popular in the 10th century. The Cluny Abbey in Burgundy, France (909 – 910), the Glastonbury Abbey in England (943), and Mount Athos in Macedonia (961) led the way for restoration of regular monasticism.
3. Monastic orders gained more popularity and influence in the 11th through 13th centuries. The Cistercian Order or White Monks (Bernard of Clairveaux, 1090 – 1153), the Franciscan order (Francis of Assisi, 1181 – 1226, monks were called "friars" or "brothers"), and Dominican order (Dominic of Spain, 1170 – 1221, known for their universities and missionaries), and the Poor Clares (Clare of Assisi, 1193 – 1253, known for their extreme self-denial) were popular during this time.
4. The Jesuits were formed by Ignatius Loyola to counter the Protestant Reformation. The Knights Templar were formed as a military order during the crusades.

D. The Corruption of Power.

1. Many of the popes were publicly corrupt, immoral, and incompetent.
2. Sexual immorality, greed, bribery, simony, nepotism, marriage, murder, gambling, dishonesty, and alcohol were common among many of the popes, especially from the 9th to 11th centuries. Some popes were assassinated because of their bad behavior or competition from their rivals.

E. The Church and State.

1. Beginning with Emperor Constantine (see Lesson 2), many desired to unite the Church with the State (Roman Empire). Four views prevailed: a) the Church is submissive to the State (Eastern Orthodox Church); b) the State is submissive to the Church (Roman Catholic Church); c) the Church and the State support each other as equals (Church of England); and d) the Church and State remain separate (Protestant denominationalism).
2. The Church in the West (Rome) took the approach that the Pope could give and withhold kings and kingdoms. Through papal tradition, letters, and decrees, many popes beginning with Nicholas I the Great (858 – 867) began to gain great control over the State.

3. The Church during the Medieval Period increased its land holdings, revenue, and appointments to civil rule. In 756, there were many lands known as “Papal States” (Italy, Sicily, Gaul, Illyria, Corsica, and Sardinia) that were under the control of Pope Stephen II (752 – 757). The *Donation of Constantine* (a disputed document from the 4th century) was used in the Middle Ages to support the claims of papal power over the states.

F. The Great Schism.

1. The influence of the Eastern Greek Church (Constantinople) was prominent from 2nd century to the 7th century. First, the ecumenical councils were controlled and held by bishops from the East. Second, four of the five patriarch bishops in the early years came from the East. Third, all major doctrinal decisions were made in the East up to the 7th century. Fourth, the early theologians (except the Latin Tertullian) were Eastern or Greek.
2. However, the influence of the Western Latin Church (Rome) is found in its papal power from 606 throughout the Medieval Period.
3. Divisions between the East and the West began c. 325 with the “Easter controversy.” Next, the battle between John the Faster and Gregory the Great raged over who would be pope, c. 588 - 606. Third, the *Filioque* Controversy was another dividing point between East and West (concerning whether or not the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father *and the Son*, see the Council of Toledo in 589 and the ruling of Photius in 864). Finally, political, doctrinal, and personality clashes between the popes in the East and West continued throughout the Medieval Period causing division. The Eastern bishops were interested in doctrinal matters while the Western bishops were interested in organization matters.
4. The Eastern church under the patriarchy of Michael Cerularius began to break from Rome in 1052 and the formal division between the West and in the East took place on July 16, 1054 forming the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church under the Papacy of Michael Cerularius. Some unity was found between the two churches at the Second Council of Lyons (1274), but the division has never been fully mended to this day. In 1965, Roman Catholic excommunications against the Eastern Orthodox Church were removed which opened the way for friendlier relations between the two groups.
5. Similarities and differences between the two:
 - a) Similarities include papal power, worship of Mary, saints, the seven sacraments, purgatory, and transubstantiation.
 - b) Differences include the mode of baptism, instrumental music, use of icons and images, and priestly marriage.
6. From the Eastern Orthodox Church, came the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1200’s and 1300’s.

G. The Crusades.

1. The “Holy Lands” (Jerusalem and Palestine) had been taken over by Muslim Seljuk Turks in 1070 – 1071. These Muslims did not want Christians making their pilgrimages to the “Holy Lands.” So, the Catholic Church devised a plan to regain control from the Muslims through carnal warfare. The Catholic Church sent paid soldiers into Palestine to kill Muslims. They were promised forgiveness of sins for their work and immediate entrance into heaven if they were killed in battle.
2. Emperor Alexius Comnenus (1081 – 1118) in the East asked for the help of Pope Urban II (1088 – 1099) in the West to regain Palestine from the Muslims. Pope

Urban II called for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095. Antioch was recaptured from the Muslims in 1098 and Jerusalem in 1099. Both Muslims and Jews were slaughtered. Baldwin, brother of Duke Godfrey, was crowned king of Jerusalem in 1100. Pope Urban II defended the validity of a crusade on the following grounds: a) a Christian could engage in a just-war; b) the right of a knight to sacred warfare; and c) the Pope could declare a war holy and all Christians as soldiers.

3. Some of the motives behind the crusades were: a) true, but misguided devotion to Christ; b) love of adventure; c) plunder of wealth; d) territorial advancement; and e) religious hatred.
4. Seven great crusades were conducted between 1095 and 1291: a) the First Crusade was against Jerusalem (1096 – 1099); b) the Second Crusade, proclaimed by Pope Eugenius III (1145 – 1153) was a failure and included the famous Knights Templar to protect the crusaders and the Knights Hospitaller to care for the wounded (1147); c) the Third Crusade, proclaimed by Pope Gregory VIII (1187) and Pope Clement III (1187 – 1191), had some success and included the famous Richard the “Lionheart” of England (1189 - 1192); d) the Fourth Crusade, proclaimed by Pope Innocent III, captured Constantinople (1202 – 1204); e) the last three crusades, including the “Children’s Crusade” of 1212, were not as successful as the first four. The crusades to the “Holy Lands” included a northern crusade against pagans in northern Europe and the Baltic states (1150’s) and an Iberian (Spain) crusade in 1147.
5. The crusades were not successful overall and made no permanent conquest of Palestine for the Catholic Church. They did, however, further the increase of papal power and land holdings of the Catholic Church.

H. The Inquisition.

1. When many began to break away from the Catholic Church toward the end of the Medieval Period, they were regarded as heretics and schismatics.
2. The Catholic Inquisition, formalized by Pope Gregory IX (1227 – 1241), was an attempt to exterminate heresy by examination, punishment and death. The first period of Inquisition came when kings and popes put heretics to death from the 11th to 14th centuries (the famous Cathari sect which denied the incarnation of Jesus and the Albigensians were included among the heretics). The second period of Inquisition came when witches (with alleged Satanic powers) were put to death in the 14th and 15th centuries. The third period of Inquisition, the Spanish Inquisition, came when Jews, Muslims, Protestants and those who practiced the “dark arts” were put to death in the 15th century.
3. The methods of Inquisition included trial, imprisonment, seizure of property, the torture wheel, burning oil, quartering with horses, flaying alive, death, etc. The brutality of the Inquisition was not limited to the living. In the case of John Wycliffe, his body was dug up from the grave and his bones burned.

IV. CATHOLICISM OPPOSED.

A. Seeds of Discontent.

1. The Catholic Church had dissenters and opponents due to their large scale domination, corruption, and persecution of people for many years.

B. Opponents of Catholicism During the Medieval Period.

1. The Albigenses, located in southern France opposed the Catholic Church, c. 1170 - 1208. They opposed the papacy, tradition-authority, purgatory, the

priesthood, image-worship, etc. They tried to circulate copies of the NT scriptures and were persecuted by Pope Innocent III during a “crusade” against them.

2. The Waldenses (Peter Waldo), located in southern France, Spain and Italy, opposed the Catholic Church (c. 1176 – 1184). They opposed purgatory, indulgences, and the monetary excess of the Catholic Church. They were persecuted by Pope Alexander III (1179) and Pope Lucius III, but continue to practice in Italy to this day.
3. The Scholastics. Various students of the Bible (the Latin Vulgate) during the Medieval Period studied “the trivium” (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and “the quadrivium” (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) outside the Catholic monastic orders in university settings (such as Paris and Oxford). They used these subjects in their defense of the Bible and to demonstrate that faith is reasonable. They were not content to let the leaders of the Catholic Church do their thinking for them. Men such as Beranger of Tours (999 – 1088, combated the concept of the Mass), Anselm (1033 – 1109, the Trinity, the Atonement, the ontological argument for the existence of God), Peter Abelard (1079 – 1142, God’s love for man via the Atonement, the theological training manual *Yes and No*), Peter Lombard (1100 – 1160), and Thomas Aquinas (1224 – 1274, known for his apologetic and systematic work in *Summa Contra* and *Summa Theologica*) were part of the “Scholasticism” movement. Dun Scotus (1265 – 1308) and William of Occam (1349) were scholars who moved away from “Scholasticism.”

V. LESSONS LEARNED.

A. Apostasy Re-cycles and Grows Worse.

1. The apostasies of the first six hundred years were re-cycled and promoted to a greater degree.
2. The apostate church which came out of the Medieval Period bore little resemblance to the NT church which began on Pentecost in Acts 2.

B. The True Spirit of New Testament Christianity was Lost.

1. True prophecy (Jn. 3:31-36) was replaced with false prophecy (Islam).
2. Following Christ (Mt. 17:5) was replaced with following men (the Papacy).
3. Influence (Mt. 5:13-15; Jn. 17:15-17; Phil. 2:15) was replaced by false piety and withdrawal (Monastic orders)
4. Purity (1 Tim. 4:12) was replaced with immorality (the corrupt Papacy).
5. Unity (Amos 3:3; Jn. 17:20-21) was replaced with division (the Great Schism).
A HOUSE NOT BUILT BY THE LORD WILL FALL (Psa. 127:1; Mt. 12:25).
6. Peace and spiritual warfare (Isa. 2:2-4; Mt. 26:52; Jn. 18:33,36; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Eph. 6:10ff) was replaced with physical warfare (the Crusades).
7. Love (Jn. 13:35) was replaced with brutality and coercion (the Inquisition).

C. Faithful Opposition.

1. A few chose to stand against the Papal power of the Medieval Period.
2. This takes courage and conviction (Jude 3).
3. This takes a desire to study God’s word for yourself (Col. 2:8,16,18; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:16-18).

VI. CONCLUSION.

- A. In Times of Oppression, Corruption, and Darkness, Walk As Children of Light (Eph. 5:7).
- B. The Faithful Remnant of the Lord's Church.
 - 1. The Lord has always had a remnant of people who remain faithful to him during any period of history (1 Kings 19:18; Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:10,14).
 - 2. Will you be a part of that faithful remnant?