

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

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PART 19: FAITH, PERSECUTION, AND RELIGIOUS WAR

IN DEFENSE OF LUTHER

When Luther studied the Bible, he was convinced that the Messiah came to suffer and pay for the sins of the world. He was therefore angered by Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and by the Jewish aggressive and contentious traditions that denied Jesus' identity, virgin birth, and divine nature.¹ Luther loved Jesus Christ and the Jewish attacks upon the Son of God contributed to the increasingly hostile language found in his later writings.

Economic issues also influenced Christian attitudes toward Jews during this period. Because Jews had frequently been prohibited from owning land, joining guilds, or entering many professions, some became involved in commerce, moneylending, and finance. Luther strongly opposed usury and came to associate Jewish moneylenders with financial exploitation. His anger eventually went far beyond theological disagreement and resulted in harsh proposals against Jewish communities.

In his later writings, Luther advocated severe measures, including the destruction of synagogues, restrictions upon rabbis, confiscation of religious writings, and the expulsion of Jews from German territories. His disappointment that Jews had not embraced his understanding of Christianity developed into open hostility toward them.

Luther also lived during a period in which German princes frequently depended upon lenders, merchants, and financial networks to fund their governments and military activities. He feared the political influence that could accompany excessive indebtedness.

The Thirty Years' War began in 1618, seventy-two years after Luther's death, and devastated much of central Europe until 1648. Protestant and Roman Catholic powers required enormous financial resources to maintain their armies. Governments depended upon taxes, merchants, contractors, lenders, and financiers.

More than a century later, Mayer Amschel Rothschild and his five sons confirmed Luther's fears when they established one of Europe's most influential international banking networks. The Rothschild family became important financiers to several European governments, particularly during the nineteenth century.

From a biblical perspective, the issue is the ethnicity of those who control financial institutions, and the future concentration of political, religious, and economic power described in prophecy. The Book of Revelation presents the Antichrist system as exercising extraordinary authority over the nations and eventually controlling economic participation.

¹ Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 104b; Sanhedrin 67a.



The Kabbalah with its serpent messiah is a Jewish idea, embraced by Jews for thousands of years, with King Solomon being its most prominent believer. Solomon received exactly 666 talents of gold in tribute and constructed a throne with six steps and six lions positioned on each side, so that anyone standing before him was confronted with this numerical imagery.

The Book of Revelation identifies Solomon through the number associated with his Kabbalistic name, 666, and establishes a parallel between Solomon and the coming Antichrist. The Antichrist will ultimately fulfill the role of the serpent messiah and the Kabbalah will become the official religion of the future World Government.

DENOUNCED BY LUTHERAN CHURCHES

Beginning in 1983 and continuing into the 1990s, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) officially denounced what it regarded as anti-Semitic teachings in the writings of Martin Luther. In 1983, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod issued the following statement:

Resolved, That we condemn any and all discrimination against others on account of race or religion or any coercion on that account and pledge ourselves to work and witness against such sins; and be it further

Resolved, That we reaffirm that the bases of our doctrine and practice are the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and not Luther, as such; and be it further

Resolved, That while, on the one hand, we are deeply indebted to Luther for his rediscovery and enunciation of the Gospel, on the other hand, we deplore and disassociate ourselves from Luther's negative statements about the Jewish people, and, by the same token, we deplore the use today of such sentiments by Luther to incite anti-Christian and/or anti-Lutheran sentiment; and be it further

Resolved, That in our teaching and preaching we take care not to confuse the religion of the Old Testament (often labeled "Yahwism") with the subsequent Judaism, nor misleadingly speak about "Jews" in the Old Testament ("Israelites" or "Hebrews" being much more accurate terms), lest we obscure the basic claim of the New Testament and of the Gospel to being in substantial continuity with the Old Testament and that the fulfillment of the ancient promises came in Jesus Christ; and be it further

Resolved, That we avoid the recurring pitfall of recrimination (as illustrated by the remarks of Luther and many of the early church fathers) against those who do not respond positively to our evangelistic efforts; and be it finally

Resolved, That, in that light, we personally and individually adopt Luther's final attitude toward the Jewish people, as evidenced in his last sermon: "We want to treat them with

Christian love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord" (Weimar edition, Vol. 51, p. 195).²

FINAL YEARS, ILLNESS AND DEATH

Luther struggled with illness for many years. He had long been afflicted with Ménière's disease and also suffered from a cataract in one eye.³ From 1531 to 1546, his health steadily declined. By 1536, he was troubled by kidney and bladder stones, arthritis, and an ear infection that ruptured his eardrum. In December 1544, he was also afflicted with angina.⁴

As his physical condition worsened, Luther became increasingly short-tempered, and his writings grew harsher. His final years were clearly difficult. He preached his last sermon on February 15, 1546, in Eisleben, the city of his birth. The sermon addressed what he saw as the stubborn refusal of the Jews to become Christians. He stated that they should be driven out of Germany, condemned them for usury, and called them "public enemies." Three days later, he died.

KATHARINA VON BORA

When Luther died, his salary as a professor and pastor came to an end, leaving Katharina without a steady source of income. Although Luther had transferred ownership of his possessions and properties to her, including the Black Cloister, she faced an uncertain financial future. Before his death, Luther had advised her to sell the Black Cloister and purchase a more modest home where she could raise their remaining children.

In the years following Luther's death, Katharina endured a series of hardships. The Schmalkaldic War (1546-1547) forced her to flee Wittenberg and seek refuge in Magdeburg. When she attempted to return in 1547, renewed danger compelled her to flee again, this time to Braunschweig. After the war ended, she was finally able to return to Wittenberg.

Upon her return, Katharina discovered that the Black Cloister had been devastated and that the family's livestock had either been stolen or killed. With her property damaged and her financial resources severely diminished, she struggled to support her household. She received financial assistance from John Frederick I, Elector of Saxony, and several other German princes.

Katharina remained in Wittenberg until 1552, when an outbreak of the plague forced her to flee once more. While traveling to Torgau, the wagon in which she was riding veered into a ditch, leaving her seriously injured. She never fully recovered from the accident and died approximately three months later, on December 20, 1552, at the age of 53.

² <https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/faqs/lcms-views#antisemitic>

³ Ménière's disease is a disorder of the inner ear characterized by episodes of vertigo, tinnitus, hearing loss, and a feeling of fullness in the ear.

⁴ Angina is chest pain caused by insufficient blood flow to the heart muscle, often related to partial obstruction or spasms in the arteries that supply blood to the heart.

RESTORING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The church of Jesus Christ was born around AD 33 on the Day of Pentecost, when the 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem were baptized in the Holy Spirit. In AD 325, the Roman Catholic Church began to emerge as an institution closely associated with the Roman Empire. Over the following years, it gained increasing religious and political power, gradually devouring the original church established by Jesus Christ.

God raised up Martin Luther more than a thousand years after Pentecost, preordained before the foundation of the world to challenge the power of Satan and break the religious monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church.

Luther was destined to confront the stranglehold that Rome exercised over Christianity. A man entrusted with such a calling must possess extraordinary emotional strength, unwavering determination, and the courage to stand against opposition. He must be firmly grounded in his faith in Jesus Christ, refuse to be intimidated by criticism, and remain committed to the task God has given him. Regardless of the obstacles, he must never lose sight of his original calling.

As believers in Jesus Christ living approximately 500 years after the Protestant Reformation, we should praise God that Luther neither surrendered nor compromised under the tremendous pressure brought against him by Roman Catholic authorities, emperors, and kings.

When Luther began preaching the necessity of personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, he encountered fierce resistance from religious and political leaders. In addition to this opposition, he experienced horrible pushback from Satan.

Luther was much like the first stage of a rocket. His mission was to break through the religious domination of Rome and establish the foundation upon which later reformers could build. However, his work did not address every doctrine and practice inherited from the Roman Catholic Church. Although he challenged many Catholic teachings, he retained infant baptism, including the practice of sprinkling, rather than rejecting it altogether.

There were also important commands and ministries of Jesus that Luther did not emphasize to the extent that later Christian movements would. Missionary work, for example, did not become a central feature of his reformation, despite the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, in which Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all nations, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe everything He had commanded.

Likewise, Luther did not establish a sustained ministry centered on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, divine healing, or casting out evil spirits. These aspects of Christian ministry would receive greater attention in subsequent movements as believers sought to recover practices that were part of the original New Testament church.

God continued this work through other men who built upon the foundation laid during the Reformation.

One of these was Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), who became a leading figure in the Moravian Church. Under his leadership, the Moravians emphasized prayer, spiritual

renewal, evangelism, and missionary outreach. Their ministry helped restore a strong emphasis on the active work of the Holy Spirit and the responsibility of Christians to carry the Gospel throughout the world.

John Wesley (1703-1791) was deeply influenced by the Moravians and experienced a decisive spiritual awakening in London in 1738. He subsequently became a powerful evangelist whose preaching emphasized personal conversion, holiness, and a life transformed by the power of God. His ministry became the foundation of the Methodist movement.

George Whitefield (1714-1770), who became associated with Wesley through their involvement in the Holy Club at Oxford, emerged as another influential evangelist. He traveled extensively throughout Britain and the American colonies, preaching the necessity of the new birth. His ministry contributed significantly to the religious revivals that became known as the First Great Awakening.

Through the ministries of Zinzendorf, Wesley, and Whitefield, the work of the Reformation continued to develop. Each contributed to a renewed emphasis on personal salvation, spiritual awakening, evangelism, and missionary activity.

Martin Luther had broken through barriers that had stood for centuries, but his work was not the final stage of restoration. Others followed, building upon what had come before and recovering additional aspects of Christian teaching and practice. The work did not belong to any one man or denomination. God used different servants in different generations to call believers back to Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the mission entrusted to His church.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

The Devil was determined to undermine the Reformation. In 1529, an effort was made to unite the German and Swiss reformers at the Marburg Colloquy. Although the Holy Spirit sought unity among believers, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli could not reach an agreement concerning the Lord's Supper. Their disagreement prevented the reformers from establishing a united Protestant movement, and the Swiss Reformation continued along a separate path.

Following Zwingli's death in 1531, John Calvin (1509-1564) eventually emerged as one of the most influential leaders of the Swiss Reformation. From Geneva, he developed and systematized theological teachings that would later become known as Calvinism.

Meanwhile, Satan continued his efforts to undermine the Reformation by stirring up religious conflict, warfare, and persecution. Rather than allowing the reformers to stand united against the authority of Rome, division weakened their collective strength and contributed to the emergence of distinct Protestant denominations.

THE EIGHTY YEARS WAR (1566-1648)

The Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), also known as the Dutch Revolt, was a prolonged and bloody struggle between the people of the Netherlands and their Spanish Habsburg rulers. The Habsburg dynasty was one of the most powerful ruling families in Europe, with branches controlling Spain, Austria, Bohemia, Hungary, the Netherlands, and territories in Italy. Through dynastic marriages and inheritance, the Habsburgs had

accumulated vast territories. The Spanish and Austrian branches of the family were closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church, and the Spanish rulers sought to suppress the spread of Protestantism in their possessions.

The Reformation had spread throughout the Netherlands, where many Protestants embraced the teachings of John Calvin rather than those of Martin Luther. By 1566, two years after Calvin's death and twenty years after Luther's death, religious tensions had reached a breaking point. Calvinist-inspired disturbances erupted across the Netherlands, including attacks on Catholic churches and the destruction of religious images. These events became known as the Iconoclastic Fury and marked a major escalation in the growing resistance against Spanish Habsburg authority.⁵

The Eighty Years' War officially began in 1568, although the unrest had started earlier. It was not a continuous war but a prolonged conflict marked by military campaigns, sieges, rebellions, and periods of relative peace. One of its principal leaders was William of Orange (1533-1584), also known as William the Silent, who became the central figure in the Dutch struggle against Spanish rule.

In the summer of 1559, William accompanied King Henry II of France on a hunting excursion. According to William's later account, the French king revealed the existence of a secret understanding with Philip II of Spain to suppress Protestantism in France and the Netherlands. Henry mistakenly believed that William was already aware of the plan. William remained silent but privately resolved to oppose the persecution and slaughter of Protestants, particularly those living in the Netherlands. The existence and precise nature of this alleged agreement remain disputed among historians.

Religious unrest and resistance to Spanish authority continued to intensify. In 1567, King Philip II dispatched Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, the third Duke of Alba, to restore royal authority and crush the rebellion. Alba instituted severe measures against those accused of heresy and rebellion, establishing a special tribunal that condemned numerous people to death. His harsh policies deepened resentment toward Spanish rule and strengthened resistance among Calvinists and other Protestant groups. Anabaptists and Mennonites also suffered persecution, although their commitment to nonviolence generally kept them outside the armed rebellion.

In 1568, William of Orange assembled an army in Germany and launched a military campaign against Spanish forces in the Netherlands. However, his campaign failed to achieve its objectives. As winter approached, he was unable to continue paying his soldiers and was forced to withdraw. William subsequently sought refuge and support in France, but his determination to resist Spanish rule remained unchanged.

A major turning point came in 1572 when a group of Dutch rebels known as the Sea Beggars captured the port of Brielle. Their success encouraged other towns and cities in Holland and Zeeland to join the rebellion. Recognizing the opportunity, William returned with another army, hoping to coordinate his campaign with French Huguenot forces.

⁵ An iconoclast is someone who opposes or destroys religious images, particularly when those images are believed to encourage idolatry.

However, those plans were severely disrupted by the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in August 1572, when thousands of French Protestants were killed. The massacre shattered William's hopes of receiving substantial assistance from the Huguenots and weakened his military campaign against Spanish forces.

The Spanish military meanwhile experienced a major crisis in 1576 when unpaid soldiers mutinied and began plundering towns and cities throughout the Netherlands. The violence culminated in the Sack of Antwerp, during which thousands of inhabitants were killed and large portions of the city were destroyed. These atrocities further weakened Spanish authority and encouraged the provinces to unite in demanding the withdrawal of foreign troops.

The conflict continued for decades. In 1579, the northern provinces strengthened their alliance through the Union of Utrecht, laying the foundation for what became the Dutch Republic. In 1581, they formally rejected the authority of Philip II. Although William of Orange was assassinated in 1584, the rebellion continued under subsequent Dutch leaders.

After many years of fighting, a temporary peace was established through the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621). However, warfare resumed in 1621 and continued until 1648.

The Eighty Years' War finally ended with the Peace of Münster, signed in the German city of Münster in 1648. The treaty was concluded between Philip IV of Spain and the States General of the Dutch Republic. Spain formally recognized the independence of the Dutch Republic, bringing an end to eighty years of conflict.

The war devastated large parts of the Netherlands and caused immense suffering among soldiers and civilians. Estimates of the death toll vary, but it is estimated that 600,000 to 700,000 soldiers and civilians killed.

The outcome marked a major turning point in European history. The northern Netherlands secured their independence from Spanish Habsburg rule, and the Dutch Reformed Church became a dominant religious institution in the new republic. Although the war involved political independence, taxation, and resistance to centralized authority, religious persecution and the determination of Protestants to preserve their faith were central factors in the struggle.

THIRTY YEARS WAR (1618-1648)

The Roman Catholic Church viewed the rapid expansion of Lutheranism throughout Germany and neighboring territories as a serious threat to its religious authority. The growing division between Catholics and Protestants eventually contributed to the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), one of the most destructive conflicts in European history.

The roots of the conflict can be traced to the Peace of Augsburg, signed on September 25, 1555. The agreement was negotiated under the authority of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, primarily through his brother Ferdinand, and the Papist and Lutheran estates of the Holy Roman Empire. It was intended to bring an end to decades of religious conflict following the Protestant Reformation.

Under the settlement, the rulers of the various principalities within the Holy Roman Empire were permitted to choose either Roman Catholicism or Lutheranism as the

official religion of their territories. This arrangement became known as *cuius regio, eius religio*, meaning “whose realm, his religion.” The people living under these rulers were generally expected to follow the religion of their prince or relocate to another territory where their faith was accepted.

Although the agreement temporarily reduced religious warfare, it did not establish genuine religious freedom. Calvinists, Anabaptists, and other Protestant groups were excluded from its protections. Furthermore, disputes over church property, political authority, and the rights of religious minorities continued to create tensions between Roman Catholic and Protestant rulers.

By 1618, these unresolved conflicts erupted into open warfare when Protestant nobles in Bohemia rebelled against the Catholic Habsburg dynasty. What began as a struggle within the Holy Roman Empire gradually developed into a major European war involving several powerful nations.

The conflict changed significantly when Denmark entered the war in 1625 under King Christian IV, supporting the Protestant cause. In 1630, Sweden intervened under King Gustavus Adolphus, whose military campaigns initially achieved major victories against Papist imperial forces.

France, although a predominantly Roman Catholic nation ruled by a Papist monarchy, entered the war directly against the Habsburg powers in 1635. Its involvement demonstrated that the conflict was no longer simply a religious struggle between Catholics and Protestants. Political ambitions, territorial interests, and the desire to weaken Habsburg power had become equally important factors.

As the war continued, armies from Sweden, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and other participating states devastated large portions of Germany. Cities and towns were besieged, plundered, and sometimes burned. Farms were destroyed, livestock was seized, and entire communities were left without sufficient food or shelter.

One of the most destructive features of the war was the manner in which armies sustained themselves. Military commanders frequently depended upon contributions extracted from occupied territories, forced requisitions, and outright plunder. Soldiers seized food, money, livestock, and valuables from civilians, often without regard for the religious faith of the inhabitants.

The armies also depended upon networks of merchants, financiers, and military contractors to obtain weapons, ammunition, food, horses, and other essential supplies. These suppliers included Christian and Jewish merchants, some of whom conducted business across political and religious boundaries. Certain contractors accumulated considerable wealth through military supply agreements, although others faced substantial financial losses when rulers and commanders failed to honor their obligations.

Thus, while soldiers fought and civilians suffered, some merchants and military contractors profited from the continuing demand for supplies. The business of sustaining armies became an important part of the war economy, and commercial interests did not always follow the religious divisions that separated the opposing forces.

After three decades of devastating warfare, the major powers gradually recognized that a negotiated settlement was necessary. Emperor Ferdinand III participated in the peace negotiations, which culminated in the Peace of Westphalia on October 24, 1648. The agreements brought an end to the Thirty Years' War and established a new political and religious settlement within the Holy Roman Empire.

The human cost was immense. Estimates vary between 4.5 to 8 million soldiers and civilians are believed to have died from warfare, famine, disease, and the widespread destruction of agricultural production. Some German territories suffered catastrophic population losses, with certain regions losing more than half of their inhabitants.

The destruction extended far beyond the battlefield. Villages disappeared, towns were reduced to ruins, trade declined, and agricultural lands were left uncultivated. Even after the peace was signed, many communities required decades to recover from the devastation.

The Peace of Westphalia confirmed the legal standing of Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism within the Holy Roman Empire while extending recognition to the Reformed (Calvinist) churches. It also placed further limitations on the ability of rulers to impose religious uniformity upon their subjects.

The Thirty Years' War demonstrated the terrible consequences of allowing religious divisions, political ambitions, and military power to become intertwined. Although the Protestant Reformation had challenged the authority of Rome and established new Christian movements, the struggle that followed brought suffering and destruction to millions of people throughout Europe.