

What happened in between 257 AD and 1517 – Wilderness Years of the Church

257 AD – Persecution against the True Light

In 257 AD Emperor Valerian issued an edict to sacrifice to the gods in order to protect the empire. Those who did not sacrifice were un-Roman. A certificate of sacrifice was issued to prove that you had and consequently considered a citizen. [2]

Sounds very like something Daniel had to encounter where the enemy tries to force Christians to recant their belief. This is the mark of the beast on the right hand or the forehead (Rev 13:16), it contrasts the Shema “Listen, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” Deuteronomy 6:4 which is recited as an act of testifying in God morning and night. This is written down and placed in Tefillin boxes at times attached to a Jew’s forehead and arms.

The Sasanian empire put an end to Emperor Valerian in 260 AD. How fitting that the enemy of God's people was punished came again from the same region, about 1000 years afterwards. Cyrus had defeated the Babylonian empire and Esther stood up to Haman during the reign of the Persians. After the Parthians (who ruled during the time of Jesus), here were the Sasanians, Neo-Persians, the agents of God's retribution.

But soon afterwards came Great Persecution was initiated in 303 AD under the reign of the Emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius when Christianity was considered a threat to Roman beliefs. This came to end with Constantine the Great in whose reign the First Council of Nicea was convened. The Nicene Creed would provide a core belief to hold onto into the Dark Ages.

617 AD – Fighting about the True Light

The Roman empire had collapsed in the West, but it carried on in the East as the Byzantine empire and characterised by the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Byzantine empire engaged in a costly war against the Sasanian empire from 602 to 628 BC.

In 613 BC Muhammad began to preach and the Islamic Caliphate would soon spread across the Middle East.

Before this, during the Byzantine-Sasanian war, Jerusalem was fought over. Shahrbaraz, king of the Sasanian empire, reinforced by Jewish forces led by Nehemiah ben Hushiel and Benjamin Tiberias, took Jerusalem. The Jews thought that the Persians would be favourable to them. In fact, in 614 BC Nehemiah Bin Hushiel planned to build a third temple, but he was killed in a Christian revolt that briefly took the city before Shahrbaraz retook the city. Many Christians were killed. Yet, probably because of pressure from Christian back home, Shahrbaraz sided with the Christians over the Land of Israel in 617 AD. [3][4]

In years of the war the Byzantine empire took back Jerusalem, as Emperor Heraclius marched in triumph with pieces of the 'True Cross'. The Christian rule of the Holy Land was short lived, for the Islamic Caliphate came to rule for centuries afterwards.

Bloodshed by the sword was not the only form of death that swept the Mediterranean:

“The Plague of Justinian” which first emerged during the reign of the Roman emperor Justinian, caused Europe's population to drop by around 50% between the 6th and 8th centuries AD.” [7]

In 1054 AD theological and political differences in the Church culminated in ‘The East-West Schism’. Then came the Crusades for the Holy Land (1096 – 1271 AD) – the most famous of which was the 3rd Crusade in which Richard I (the ‘Lion Heart’) fought against Saladin. [5][6]

1337 AD – Infighting between the followers of the True Light

1337 – 1453 AD came a series of conflicts in Europe called The Hundred Years’ War! This was waged between French and English Houses.

“In the following decades, the weakening of royal authority, combined with the devastation caused by the bubonic plague and 20 to 33% of the English one) and the major economic crisis that followed, led to a period of civil unrest in both countries, struggles from which England emerged first.” [7]

The plague was the cause of the Black Death which reduced the world's population from an estimated 450 million 375 million. [8]

Then came split within the Catholic Church, ‘The Western Schism’, in which two men (by 1410 three) simultaneously claimed to be the true pope

“No matter how many Jews, or others, were killed, however, the plague raged on and God seemed deaf to the prayers and supplications of believers. In Europe, the perceived failure of God to answer these prayers contributed to the decline of the medieval Church’s power and the eventual splintering of a unified Christian worldview during the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648 CE). In the East, Islam remained intact, more or less, owing to its insistence on the plague as a gift which bestowed martyrdom on the victims and transported them instantly to paradise as well as the view of the disease as simply another trial to endure such as famine or flood.“ [10]

1517 AD – Grace

With so much bloodshed, division and violence during the Dark Ages, the doctrine of grace came as a breath of fresh air into the Church once again.

[2] Mythbusting Ancient Rome – throwing Christians to the lions

<https://theconversation.com/mythbusting-ancient-rome-throwing-christians-to-the-lions-67365>

[3] Jewish revolt against Heraclius

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_revolt_against_Heraclius

[4] Jewish History Years

<http://www.jewishhistory.org.il/history.php?startyear=610&endyear=619>

[5] Caliphate

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate>

[6] Crusades

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crusades>

[7] The Hundred Years' War

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Years%27_War

[8] World Population

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_population

[9] Western Schism

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Schism

[10] The Black Death

<https://www.ancient.eu/article/1541/religious-responses-to-the-black-death/>