



The Incredible
Journey

ONE WORLD TWO EMPIRES



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ONE WORLD, TWO EMPIRES

Standing on the Mount of Olives, looking out over Jerusalem, Jesus was given a vision of its coming destruction. It seemed impossible that Jerusalem could fall, but Jesus saw her besieged by Roman armies and ravaged by the horrors of war, bowing low under the iron fist of the empire. The scene broke his heart and he wept over the city and people he loved so much.

But it was not only the destruction of Jerusalem that haunted Him. Looking into the future, he caught a glimpse of the persecution that would break loose over the new church soon to be birthed in his name. The bitterest persecutions began around the time Nero sentenced

the apostle Paul to death. Because Paul was a Roman Citizen by birth, he was in possession of the coveted *Civis Romanus* and could not be crucified or thrown to the arena. Instead he was beheaded. A simple and quick death.

Other Christians were not so fortunate. They were daubed in pitch and set alight, crucified or thrown to the wild beasts. They died in arenas across the Empire, amidst the frenzied roar of spectators, crazed with a bizarre bloodlust that was peculiar to the feckless Roman mob.

But they did not die in vain. As Tertullian later wrote in his defense of Christianity, *Apologeticus*, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”. For every martyr that died, a dozen more Christians rose up to fill their place. Slaughter could not vanquish the church. In death, she was unbowed and victorious.

But the tide of persecution and growth was soon replaced by something that appeared more pleasant but was, in fact, more sinister. The winds of change blew over the church in the face of a single, almost negligible, historical detail; the conversion of Constantine to Christianity.

Born in the shadow of Imperial Rome, Constantine was a true son of the Empire. His father, Constantius, ruled the western part of the Empire as one of three tetrarchs, governing under the emperor Diocletian. Constantine was educated at the court of Diocletian and served the Emperor as a military tribune before joining his father to campaign in the west, settling for a time in Britannia (Britain). It was while he was in Britain, at York, that Constantius passed away and Constantine assumed his throne in 306 A.D.

Hungry for absolute power over the Empire, Constantine began to campaign

against the other tetrarchs. His most formidable opponents were Maxentius and Licinius. During a campaign against Maxentius, Constantine is reported to have had a dream in which he was shown a cross in the sky and told: “By this sign conquer.” Superstitiously, Constantine embraced the god of the Christians.

In 313 AD, together with Licinius, who was still co-Emperor, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which recognized Christianity as an official religion of the Empire and called for the cessation of persecution. Many historians believe that the Edict was issued as a declaration of faith in the wake of Constantine’s recent conversion to Christianity.

Once he became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire, Constantine began to unify Christianity and Paganism. The Roman pantheon of gods was slowly

assimilated into Christianity through the worship of saints. Pagan festivals were Christianised and the worship of the mother goddess, a relic from the ancient world, was revived through the cultic worship of the virgin Mary.

Slowly, insidiously, the church of Christ changed her robes and took on the garb of a spectre, a ghost, a shadow of her former pure self. When Constantine moved the capital of the empire from Rome to Constantinople, the Bishop of Rome was only too happy to step into the vacuum of power this created.

Being allowed more and more power under each successive emperor, the Bishop of Rome grew in prominence and strength, soon becoming an almost invincible power broker throughout the empire.

And then the barbarian hordes streamed across the Rhine and began to hack the empire into pieces. Attila brought his huns and sacked Rome again and again. Alaric and the Goths streamed through the empire. Wave after wave of germanic tribes began to progressively hack their way through the Western Roman Empire, carving out a place for themselves until finally, in 476 A.D., the Roman Empire was no more.

What remained was a collection of tribal nations, each vying for territorial superiority and prominence amongst their peers. And yet a single element, rose from the grave of the deceased empire and hovered grimly, like a cloud, over this newly formed collection of states: the Papacy. Quietly at first, and then more and more aggressively, the Bishop of Rome, who later styled himself the Pope, began to evangelise the pagan tribes of Western Rome.

Beginning with Clovis, King of the Franks, who was baptised on Christmas Day 508 A.D., the Papacy began to spread its influence far and wide. Soon, largely due to the powerful influence of Clovis, the Papacy was able to convert the kingdoms of Germany, Belgium and modern France. From there, many of the other kingdoms of Western Rome, submitted to the Pope.

By the middle of the 6th century the power of the Papacy had become so firmly established that she seemed almost invincible. The seat of its power was fixed in Rome and the Bishop of Rome was declared head of the entire church and given greater power and authority.

The Popes had risen to take the place of the Caesars of Rome, creating an amalgamation of godlike rulers who united church and state to spread a reign

of unmitigated power across the face of western Europe.

The changes that came upon the church were gradual. From time to time the church held councils, convening scholars, leaders and churchmen from across the empire. In every council Bible truth was slowly repressed and substituted for man made traditions. Plain truths that were clearly outlined in scripture were replaced with doctrines that intermingled pagan tradition with certain elements of Christianity.

In addition to this the Papacy introduced doctrines that turned the eyes of the people away from God and fixed them on the Pope. The poor, largely illiterate and superstitious population of medieval Europe, was encouraged to transfer their faith in Christ to the Pope of Rome.

They were called on to trust in the Pope for the forgiveness of their sins and to look to the priest as an intermediary between themselves and God. They were told that their eternal salvation rested in the hands of the Pope and the church, and outside of both they could have no hope of securing eternal life.

The church suppressed the scriptures. She insisted that the Bible be translated from the original languages into Latin alone, a language which the common people could not understand, let alone read. Bibles were relegated to monasteries or churches and only clergy who had been trained in Latin had access to the scriptures.

The people believed what they were taught to believe. They were not allowed to study the scriptures and think for themselves. Instead the Pope and the church did their thinking for them. When

the Bible is suppressed there is always darkness, and this period of unmitigated Papal supremacy plunged the kingdoms of Europe into terrible spiritual darkness.

By the eleventh century the Roman Church declared itself to be infallible. Pope Gregory VII proclaimed the perfection of the church, stating that the church had never erred, nor would it ever err. But Pope Gregory VII took his assertions a step further by declaring that not only was he, the Pope, infallible, but he also possessed the power to remove kings and set up kings and that no power on earth could reverse a sentence that had been pronounced by the church or the Pope.

An illustration of the all encompassing power that was wielded by the church in both the spiritual and secular arena can be seen in the treatment of the German emperor Henry IV. Henry's aggressive

military policy in Italy angered the Pope Gregory VII and he threatened the emperor with excommunication if he did not change his policy.

Henry refused and instead persuaded most of the Catholic bishops within his empire to declare Pope Gregory VII's election invalid. But the Pope was determined to have the upper hand and crush the insolent ruler.

Turning on the Emperor with the speed and venom of a striking serpent, Gregory VII excommunicated Henry and issued a decree stating that, as a result of his excommunication from the Roman Church, Henry's subjects were no longer bound to offer him their allegiance.

The Pope's decree gave every seditious fanatic with a dagger license to murder their emperor. Alarmed by the potential threat to himself and his throne the

emperor was forced to humble himself before the Pope. Trekking through the Alps to Canossa Castle in Italy, where the Pope was staying with the Margravine of Tuscany, the emperor humbly applied to the Pope for ablution and a lifting of the sentence of excommunication.

The Pope forced him to wait on his knees, in supplication, for three days and three nights in front of the entrance gate of the castle while a blizzard raged around him. He was dressed in the robes of a penitent which meant that he was dressed quite scantily and not properly protected against the cold.

When the Pope was satisfied that the monarch had been sufficiently humiliated, he pardoned him and lifted the sentence of excommunication on a cold January day in 1077. The incident is hailed as one of the most dramatic events of the middle ages.

But this wasn't a single isolated event; a moment in time that was confined to a single eccentric Pope. It was the beginning of a disturbing pattern of Papal power mongering that continued throughout the middle ages.

In 1206 King John of England, arguably one of England's weakest monarchs, was forced into confrontation with Pope Innocent III, one of the Papacy's most ruthless and powerful Popes. The face-off between these two power brokers took place over the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The king put forward his nominee, but the Pope dismissed the candidate and put forward his own. The king was enraged. He understood that by dismissing the royal nominee the Pope was in fact openly challenging the authority of the king to appoint a successor to the highest ecclesiastical position in his kingdom.

It was a power play designed to establish the authority of the Roman Church as sovereign in matters concerning the leadership of the church in England. In an age where religious authority was a more formidable force than The Crown itself, Pope Innocent's move was cause for retaliation. If the Pope felt he had the authority to appoint the Archbishop of Canterbury then what was to stop him from appointing a successor to the throne itself? It wasn't as big a leap of logic as it may seem to us today. In fact, it was a valid concern.

John saw the inevitable fallout that would result if he acquiesced to the Pope's appointment and refused to give in. It was a duel between England's weakest monarch and the Papacy's strongest Pope—and the Pope won. John was forced to submit to the authority of the Pope and allowed him to appoint his candidate

as Archbishop of Canterbury. But Innocent III wasn't satisfied with this reluctant surrender.

Determined to teach King John a lesson, the Pope demanded that England pay a papal tax of 1000 marks to the Holy See and dispatched his Legate, Pandulf, to collect the money. The transaction took place on the 15th of May 1213, and to show proper submission to the authority of the Pope, King John bowed before Pandulf and placed his crown at the Papal Legate's feet. Gloating, Pandulf is said to have kicked the crown about like a worthless bauble. England was humiliated.

The quiet intermingling of paganism and Christianity that began in the day of Constantine had finally reached its apex. At the height of the middle ages the Papacy was invincible and almost

indestructible and much like the iron monarchy of the roman Caesars who had gone before it, the Papacy wielded an alarming amount of both spiritual and political power.

For the followers of Christ, the ascendancy of the Papacy was a day of reckoning. They had been battered by persecution for almost three centuries under the rule of the Caesars and, to many, the peace that Constantine and the Roman Church offered was seen as a welcome reprieve. Large numbers fell exhaustedly into the arms of this new movement. But there were those who refused to compromise, and it was along this seam that Christianity began to splinter. It was the dawn of a new day. A new era of persecution that was more bewildering and subtle, for it pitted Christian against Christian, blurring the lines between truth and error.

While the Bishops of Rome rose like spectres to occupy the throne of the Caesars, thus creating a shadow empire, those who embraced the true, unadulterated faith of the early apostles stubbornly refused to compromise their faith in exchange for peace. Where the Bishops of Rome had brought in the teachings and traditions of men as a substitute for the word of God, a handful of Christians chose to make the Bible and the Bible alone the foundation of their faith.

While the Roman Church deleted the second commandment by introducing the veneration of saints and relics; while they set up Sunday as the day of worship in place of the fourth commandment, there were those who refused to bow down to this new power.

Scattered throughout the Empire, the Celtic church in England, the Waldenses

in northern Italy, the Albigenses and Huguenots in France, formed the front line of a powerful resistance against compromise. And they paid for their convictions with their blood.

The earliest resistance against the Papacy was mounted by the Waldenses or Vaudois. The Waldenses occupied the pristine valleys nestled in the French and Italian Alps. For years they resisted the advances of the Roman Church, choosing instead to make the Bible the only spiritual authority in their lives. Unfortunately, they couldn't avoid a confrontation for very long. The Roman Church insisted that they assimilate or face the stake.

Many chose to submit but there were a few who would not go quietly. This group separated themselves and retreated further into the mountains, choosing to submit to the Word of God alone. They rallied together and coalesced into a

single interconnected network making their homes in the mountains of southwestern France and northern Italy. But divergence from the Roman Church was a costly move, one they paid for with their blood and the blood of their children.

The Waldenses were among the first people in Europe who had copies of the Bible in their native language. They were known for taking great pains to preserve the Bible, passing it down both orally and in written form to their children first, and then on to whoever was eager to know more about the Scriptures. They did this by spending hours copying the Bible by hand and then quietly spreading it wherever they went. Rubbing shoulders with ordinary men and women from all walks of life, in the bustling markets across Europe, in the quiet country towns and in the prestigious Universities, the Waldenses were constantly watching for

an opportunity to share the truth with those who were ready to listen.

Mirroring, to a great extent, the work that the Waldenses were quietly carrying out from the recesses of their mountain homes, was another outspoken champion for the truth. Before the Reformation broke loose across Europe there were men that God raised up to slowly pry open the doors of freedom and independent thought. John Wycliffe was just such a man. Wycliffe challenged the authority of the Pope and presented the authority of the Bible as more binding. He also provided the people of England with something they desperately needed; a translation of the Bible in English.

Wycliffe was educated at Oxford and was a star student. While at University he was introduced to the Bible in Latin. As he studied the Bible, Wycliffe began to see more clearly the abuses of the Papacy and

the inconsistencies between the teachings of the church and the teachings of the Bible. Not one to keep silent, Wycliffe began to speak out against the errors and superstitions that were being spread among the people by the church.

Wycliffe spoke out against the lifestyle and practices of the monks. Instead of working, monks went from house to house begging to sustain themselves. They felt entitled to live off the people and if anyone dared to refuse their request they called down eternal damnation upon their heads by refusing to pardon their sins, grant them indulgences or perform last rites for the dead. Wycliffe saw this as shameless spiritual abuse and attacked the behavior of the monks publicly.

Wycliffe's voice rang clear as a bell throughout England, challenging the people to read the Bible for themselves. But it was not only England that was

influenced by the work of John Wycliffe. Jerome of Faulfish, a Bohemian who lived in England, was influenced by Wycliffe's work.

He brought back Wycliffe's writings to Bohemia and shared them with John Huss. Huss read them and was so convinced by the truths he discovered there that he began to share them with his parishioners. Soon the principles of Bible truth were blazing across Bohemia as well.

A little over a hundred years after the death of Huss and Jerome the Reformation burst out across Europe. Through an obscure but brilliant German monk, God raised up a revolutionary movement that changed the course of history.

Martin Luther discovered the Bible while he was a student at the University of Erfurt. Bibles were a rarity, being largely confined to monasteries or the personal

libraries of scholars. Priests read from portions of the scripture occasionally, but this was always in Latin which the majority of the population couldn't understand. The Bible unlocked Luther's mind, opening it to the mysteries of salvation and truth in new ways.

Luther was born into a family of well-to-do peasants. From an early age, Luther's perception of God was shaped by the church. Luther saw God as an angry judge, harsh, unyielding and unforgiving, ever ready to punish and torment. This view of God drove him to depression, compelling him to perform all manner of fasts and rituals in order to earn favor with God and appease him.

When Luther entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt as a novice he brought this zeal with him, wearing himself down to the bone in an attempt to obtain salvation and negotiate peace

with God through his works. Commenting on his time at the monastery Luther wrote: “If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I.” But monkery couldn’t save him from the tortured imaginings of his mind and Luther found himself cursing God bitterly in one breath while longing for his love with the other.

He needed help. The emotional agony was too great, the clouds around his mind so thick and roiling, that he could not break out into the sunshine on his own. It was at this time that God organized an intervention by sending Johann Von Staupitz.

When Staupitz met Luther at the Erfurt monastery in 1506, Luther was a young monk riddled with doubts, tormented by a sense of spiritual inadequacy and hungry for a God he could learn to love instead of fear. In fact, Luther was so tormented by his sins that he once spent six hours

confessing them to Staupitz. Seeing the young man's struggles Staupitz reached out to him, helping him to understand the basics of the gospel and presenting him with a picture of a God who was merciful and gracious. Luther later said "if it were not for Dr. Staupitz, I would have sunk in hell."

Encouraged by Staupitz, Luther turned with increasing frequency to the Bible. He was captivated by the word of God and immersed himself in it day and night, begrudging the few hours he spent sleeping or eating.

The beginnings of Luther's journey away from the Roman Church were fairly innocuous. He was asked to present a matter to the Pope for arbitration and set off for Rome on foot without any inkling of the disenchantment that awaited him at the end of his journey. As he wound his way through the lush countryside,

dotted with farmsteads, vineyards, and shepherds, Luther spent his nights in monasteries. At these monasteries, Luther came face to face with vice and extravagance that appalled him. He thought about his own struggles with a plagued conscience while witnessing the flippant indifference of the monks who indulged in sins that filled him with horror.

But the vice he found in the monasteries was nothing compared to what met him on the streets of Rome. The city was a cesspool, a pit of prostitution, profanity and profligacy, the likes of which he had never seen. He struggled to make sense of what he encountered, writing “No one can imagine what sins and infamous actions are committed in Rome; they must be seen and heard to be believed. Thus they are in the habit of saying, ‘If there is a hell, Rome is built over it’ it is an abyss whence issues every kind of sin.”

While in Rome, Luther decided to avail himself of a recent indulgence that the Pope had issued to those who would ascend Pilate's staircase on their knees. While he was painfully crawling up the stairs Luther was impressed with the words "the just shall live by faith". He was so struck by the simple reality of this truth that he immediately jumped to his feet and hurried down the staircase. It was a turning point for Luther, and one that would alter the course of his entire life. Soon he would go head to head with the infamous Johann Tetzel, common criminal and indulgence peddler extraordinaire; an encounter that would set in motion the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

On Good Friday 1517, Tetzel and his traveling band marched into the little town of Juterbog. He set up his banners and his tables before mounting an amazing

little show. He offered the good people of Juterbog something they desperately needed. The opportunity to extricate a loved one from purgatory or hell for just a few coins.

To the largely illiterate peasants that swarmed, gawking, around him, Tetzal's claims were not fanciful at all. They hurriedly cobbled together the few coins they had and dropped them into Tetzal's money box in exchange for a certificate of indulgence. Standing beside them, hawk-eyed as the money slipped into the box, Tetzal intoned; "When the coin in the coffer rings, the Soul from Purgatory Springs" He was nothing but a conman.

When Tetzal blew into Saxony like an ill-fated wind, Luther was furious. Luther had openly opposed the doctrine of indulgences from as early as 1516, but when Tetzal came to town Luther had a

deeper, more personal understanding of justification by faith. In Luther's mind salvation was free, precious, personal and required sincere repentance for sin. It was a deeply intimate exchange between the soul and God. Tetzl was turning salvation into a mockery. Something that only required a willingness to fork out a few coins. The entire spectacle rankled Luther.

Angrily he wrote letters to church leaders detailing his protest against indulgences, appealing to the church to do something about men like Tetzl. But he was met with silence. Unable to bear it anymore he wrote out his protests, rolled up the parchment, and on All Saints Eve, October 31, 1517, strode through the narrow streets of Wittenberg.

Pilgrims from all over Saxony had converged on Wittenberg to see Prince

Frederick's relics and to pay an indulgence for that privilege. It was the perfect opportunity. Walking up to the Castle Church, Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door. The crowds pressed around the door to read it and someone made copies of it. Within days Luther's 95 Theses had made their way through Germany, and within weeks they had traveled across Christendom, even landing on the Pope's desk. The Reformation had officially begun and the world would never be the same again.

Like fire blazing through a parched forest the simple truths of justification by faith and the infallible authority of the Bible made their way through Europe. Soon other men began to study the Bible for themselves and came to the same conclusions as Luther. Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, John Calvin in France, William Tyndale in England, John Knox

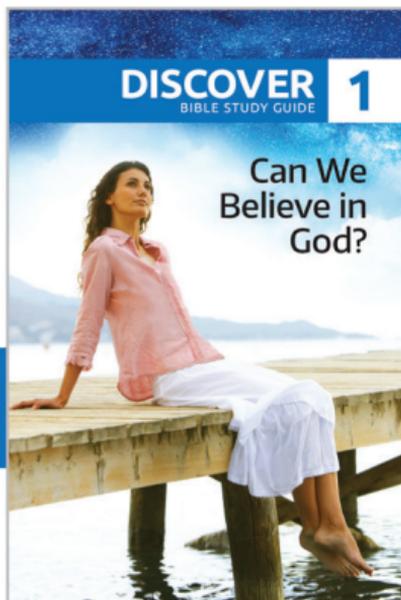
in Scotland and many others challenged the authority of the church and held up the Bible as the only foundation and source of truth.

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When Constantine chose to embrace Christianity, the Roman Empire experienced a subtle shift in power dynamics. Where Christianity was once despised and scorned, it was now embraced by the Emperor himself. However, unwilling to lose the support of the vast majority of his subjects he chose to mingle the two religions in an attempt to create a happy middle ground. This marked the beginning of a downward spiral in doctrinal compromise that left the church weak and debilitated.



Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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