

# TRUTH TRIUMPHANT: CHAPTER 1

## What is the Church in the Wilderness?

**And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. (Revelation 12:14, 6)**

THE Church in the Wilderness is the connecting link between apostolic Christianity and God's people today. The purpose of this volume is to show that there were Christian people in every country during this long period of history who possessed churches, colleges, mission stations, and theological schools; who followed closely and adhered steadfastly to the beliefs and practices delivered by the apostles to the saints; and who possessed and preserved the original Scriptures given to the church in the first century. These people constitute the Church in the Wilderness. This is a conception which is not generally held. The title, Church in the Wilderness, is taken from the Bible prophecy of Revelation 12 describing the woman who fled into the wilderness. The woman is the church.<sup>1</sup> The title clearly shows that it was not the popular or predominant church. These faithful believers held high the banner of truth, and withstood the encroachments of apostasy. Their fortunes varied, for at times they possessed many churches, famous schools, and distant mission stations, while in other ages they suffered from poverty and dire persecution.

The great missionary work of this church is little known, its sufferings have been overlooked, and its heroes unsung. In the following pages is presented the precious heritage which it has bequeathed to modern times. By restoring the true church to its rightful place, the key is recovered which unlocks the meaning of great issues confronting this present generation.

Some will ask, Should not we look to the church which for ages has been the favored of kings and nations to find the true church instead of looking to a people who for centuries were never the dominant church, and who many times were obscure? Let the prophet John answer this question: "The woman [church] fled into the wilderness." (Revelation 12:6.) In order to recognize the true church, it is imperative that we fix our eyes upon those Christian bodies which have largely been forgotten in the works of history.

Divine revelation teaches that the light which was to shine upon the last generation of men would be a continuation and an enlargement of the light which shone upon the Church in the Wilderness throughout almost thirteen centuries; namely, the 1260-year period. While it is generally recognized that the 1260-year period of the Church in the Wilderness did not begin in apostolic times, it is nevertheless necessary to introduce, this prophetic period with a proper background. The beginning and ending of the 1260-year period is established in later chapters. No particular effort is made, however, to differentiate in nomenclature between the Church in the Wilderness and its apostolic origins.

It should be understood at the outset that in giving the surprising record of this remarkable church, the old beaten paths used by almost all the writers of church history cannot be followed. The light of Bible prophecy has pointed the way for this investigation and the method in which this theme should be

treated. This subject has rarely, if ever, been presented in such a way as to reveal the amazingly interesting interrelationships which existed between and among the various groups of faithful believers in widely separated areas.

Certain modern authors have assiduously labored to belittle the American founders of religious liberty and democracy, such as Washington, Jefferson, and others. This same class of writers has invaded the realm of church history, and that which was obscure before, is growing darker. These men seek to give the glory of the Church in the Wilderness to another. Sad to relate, many sincere persons are being deceived by the astounding propaganda in books and articles founded on misleading historical bases. It is time to bring to light the many heroic struggles of the men whom God used to preserve the divine doctrines and the Holy Scriptures. The statements here made concerning the Church in the Wilderness and its history will be clarified, enlarged upon, and further explained and supported by evidence from dependable sources.

The Church in the Wilderness did not arrive at the truth by opposition to prevailing dogmas and heresies. Its faith was not a faith newly received. The religious beliefs of its members were an inheritance from the days of the apostles. To them men owe the preservation of the Bible. Contrary to almost universal belief, the Church in the Wilderness embraced the true missionary churches during the long night of the Dark Ages. It held aloft the torch of education while the rest of the world about it was falling into the darkness of ignorance and superstition. Its territory was not circumscribed. On the contrary, its influence penetrated into all parts of the known world.

### **From the Days of the Apostles**

The history of nominal Christianity is the record of bitter theological controversies, and, at times, even of bloody encounters to achieve its aims; it is a record of incredible activity to secure political power. The history of the Church in the Wilderness is a stirring revelation of consecrated, evangelical labor in continent-wide leadership for the salvation of the hopeless and benighted. It did not, as its rivals did, claim intellectual logic in doctrine; it did not attempt to enforce its views by political cruelty. It severed all territorial and family ties which might have held it to the world and to the rapacious churches of empires, thus successfully preserving its scriptural doctrines and its apostolic organization.

The present can never be properly understood without correct information concerning the past. Those who have been taught falsified history or who have had their minds filled with the twisted interpretations of events gone by, stagger like the blind with a darkened mind. Everyone today wants to be modern. But those who neglect the lessons of the past do not achieve modernity. They achieve only contemporaneity. Minds indoctrinated by histories and encyclopedias which glorify a union of church and state will pass a discontented present in a democracy which completely separates the state and the church, for they will long for, and labor to make, a different order of things. The ideas that one has concerning vanished generations have a great deal to do with one's relation to the present.

It is equally true that a person who has distorted views of the present cannot build for a better future. Those who look upon the medieval years of European history with its serfdom and theocracy as the ideal will be in revolt against modern society and will seek ways to re-establish those systems. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, the divine Creator, who unselfishly died upon a cross, will find no joy in self-sacrifice and loving service, but will reach out to seize all they can for themselves. Those who are convinced that there was a rebellion in heaven and that humanity today is surrounded by

principalities and powers of darkness will be more willing to seek the help of the Holy Spirit than if they reject the teaching of the Scripture concerning Satan and evil angels. In other words, man visualizes a future which should logically follow his estimate of present potentialities, be his estimate right or wrong.

All have not been made aware of the decisive struggles which occurred behind the scenes over the Church in the Wilderness. Many have failed to note the true centers of Christian activity in the past. They realize altogether too little the meaning of the momentous events taking place today because they are ignorant of this historical background. The correct perspective of past history is as necessary to effective leadership as the appreciation of present values. Many have but slight knowledge of the messages of God for this generation, because they have been taught to gaze not upon the underlying, but upon the superficial, origins of the past. The past which gave us democracy and religious liberty is the history which should be known and studied. We need the Sacred Book to point the way to the true history.

The Church in the Wilderness, surrounded by savage tribes and battling against barbaric darkness, has been painted by its enemies without its victories. Driven often by opposition to mountain retreats, it was saved from the corrupting influences of ecclesiastical and political power. In many parts of the world, all the way from Ireland in the west to China in the east, there were centers of truth. The leaders in these centers were united in their desire to remain in the faith, and to perpetuate from generation to generation the pure truths of the gospel handed down from the days of the apostles. Their records have been systematically destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Remoteness and obscurity, however, could not entirely conceal these heroes, because the fires of their persecution have continued to light up the scenes of their sacrificing labors.

The ungarbled history of the true church will lead to the realization that God's church of today is the successor of the Church in the Wilderness. The true church today unites the present to eternity, even as the Church in the Wilderness united the apostolic past to the present. As one follows the history of the Church in the Wilderness, the marks of identification will be given by which the final remnant church may be recognized. Such a presentation will, moreover, unmask the false, preposterous, and misleading history widely used today to discredit true history.