

CHAPTER 5

As the students comfortably settled into their seats, Mr. Dell gave the maps to Jay to hand out. “Today, class, we are going to switch our focus to the British Isles. For the next several chapters of our Bible book we will be concentrating on this part of the world. Would you please label what today we know as England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and North Ireland.”



As the students busily wrote on their maps, their teacher continued: “I’m sure you all know that March 17th is St. Patrick’s Day. That is the day dedicated to the celebration of everything Irish.”

“That’s my parent’s anniversary,” blurted out Aaron as he placed his map in his binder.

“Well, today we are going to learn about the man honored on that day. You will find his story fascinating.”

Dimming the lights, Mr. Dell turned on the projector. “To begin with, I should explain that there are two ‘Patricks’. One Patrick kept the seventh-day Sabbath and used the uncorrupted Bible as edited by Lucian. That Patrick believed in the importance of educating people so they could study God’s Word for themselves. He also was instrumental in organizing the reproduction of Scripture. That was most vital before the invention of modern printing presses, computer printers or photocopiers.

“The other Patrick was fictitious. He was credited with marvelous miracles, but his supposed

miracles did nothing to draw people closer to God or help people live better Christian lives. Those fabricated stories were simply told to make people believe that this 'impostor Patrick' was genuine. However, as we read the scraps of history that are left of the genuine Patrick, we will find that the 'sainted' Patrick had little in common with the genuine Patrick.

“Before we begin to read our story, let's take a look at the beautiful land we will be visiting. People who fly over Ireland say that it is the most lush, vibrant, living green in the world – thus the name 'Emerald Isle'. As you look at these pictures you can catch a glimpse of this fabled land for yourself.



http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/places/images/photos/photo_lg_ireland.jpg

“For those of you who love the ocean, this is a great shot, don't you think?



<http://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photo-s/01/10/d1/63/dunluce-castle-ruins.jpg>

“And how is this for an enchanted spring lane?”



http://www.pdphoto.org/jons/pictures3/ireland_241_bg_062102.jpg

“Many years ago these fascinating beehive structures housed some of God's faithful followers on the bare and isolated island, Skellig Michael. Those are quite the houses, aren't they?”



<http://www.sacredsites.com/europe/ireland/images/skelligmichael3.jpg>

“Because Patrick lived from around AD 360 – 460 there are very few credible records left to tell his story. And of course, since there were no cameras, i phones or video cameras back then we have no pictures of this great man of God. However, here is a statue of Patrick found at Leaba Padriag in Connemara which I like. You will notice that there is no halo around his head, no papal hand signs and the sculpture isn't decorated with numerous crosses. Perhaps this is the closest we will come to discovering what the real Patrick may have looked like.



<http://www.monasette.com/blog/gallery/maamturk/leaba-patrick.jpg>

“And now, Jeremy, if you will turn on the lights and switched off the projector we will continue with our study of God's heroes,” said Mr. Dell.

“Here is a map of the area where many scholars believe Patrick was born,” explained Mr. Dell as he passed out another map to the class. “This was the Kingdom of Strathclyde – in what today is northern England and southern Scotland. Again I must emphasize that to find the true Patrick we need to be rather like detectives sifting through the dusty pages of history.



“You will enjoy this story of one of God's early heroes,” said Mr. Dell as he picked up the well-worn book off his desk.

PATRICK OF IRELAND (CAD 360 – 461)

Come with me on a voyage to the craggy coasts of what today we call the British Isles. This is the land of the fabled King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, of the mysterious Stonehenge, and of the illusive Loch Ness Monster. It is here amid these green rolling hills that we will find remnants of Patrick, a leading man in our continuing story of God's true church.

It was shortly after the flood that people began to move to what we today call England, Scotland and Ireland. History tells us that Gomar, a grandson of Noah, moved to this beautiful area and began to settle the land. As the centuries rolled by, knowledge of the true God was lost and only in the years following Christ's return to heaven did divine truth again visit these islands. Early writers tell us that the disciple Philip established the Gallic Celtic church in the country know today as France. From France dedicated Christians traveled across the English Channel to Great Britain and started the British Celtic church. History shows that the Irish, Scots, British, Welsh and French spoke the same language as the Celts of Galatia in Asia Minor. Missionaries, some of whom no doubt personally listened to the great apostles Paul and John preach, brought with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are told that their Bible was the uncorrupted version that Lucian edited.

Dr. Wilkinson in his masterpiece *Truth Triumphant* tells us that for 300 years, between the time of the Apostle John and the time of Patrick, there was unbroken communication between

Europe and Asia Minor. That means that the truths the Syrian church held dear were known, and loved by fellow Christians in Europe. That continuous thread of truth can be seen in the life and beliefs of Patrick.

Patrick belonged to the Celtic race that settled the diverse land known today as Ireland and Scotland. Because wars raged for hundreds of years throughout that area, most of its written history was destroyed. That means that we don't have many accurate records about Patrick's life. However, some unusual facts are known of Patrick. It is interesting that Ireland's national hero was not born in Ireland at all but rather came from a part of England then called "the Britains." Many places have been listed as the birthplace of Patrick, however some scholars believe that he was born in the kingdom of Strathclyde, which was controlled by Rome. That would mean that, like the apostle Paul, Patrick was probably born a Roman citizen.

Rome had a huge influence over every country they conquered and England was no exception. In AD 43, Emperor Claudius sent troops into Britain. As they advanced they changed the landscape and the culture. It is estimated that the Romans built over 9600 km of roads in Britain. Not only could soldiers and supplies travel swiftly over those well-built highways, but Christian missionaries could easily take the gospel from town to town.

Although Roman life, with its pagan influences, played an important role in Britain, Patrick was raised in a religious home. We know his grandfather was active in the Celtic Church as a presbyter (a high church leader) and his father was a deacon. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens to children raised in godly homes, Patrick chose to turn his back on God. Perhaps the bewitching productions at the theater, or the violent drama of sporting events at the local coliseum, or maybe even the pageantry and color of Rome's pagan religion attract young Patrick's imagination. At any rate, like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable, Patrick chose early in his life to leave God and seek worldly pleasures. But things didn't work out as Patrick had planned. Before he turned sixteen years of age he found himself far from God and in a great deal of trouble. Like the Little Maid in the Bible, Patrick was kidnapped and taken far from his home and family. He suddenly found himself alone, afraid and captive in a foreign land.

We have a historical record of Patrick's thoughts about this life-changing experience. In his *Confession* he wrote, "I did not know the true God; and was taken to Ireland in captivity with many thousand men in accordance with our deserts, because we walked at a distance from God and did not observe His commandments."

For seven difficult years Patrick was a slave. His account of those years sounds a lot like the story of the prodigal son. His captor forced him to care for his animals and Patrick experienced both nakedness and extreme hunger. Through that school of affliction Patrick learned that turning his back on God brought only trouble and sorrow. Like the prodigal son, Patrick finally "came to himself." His heart and thoughts were drawn back to his family as he remembered the religious training given by his parents. When he finally escaped and returned home, Patrick was a truly converted Christian.

After wasting his youth in captivity Patrick had just one goal – he wanted to prepare himself to work for God. He felt the Lord was calling him to take the gospel back to the Emerald Isle. During his years of captivity he had become fluent in the Irish form of the Celtic language and he understood the people and their customs. Most of the Irish people were living under the superstitions and practices of the Druids and Patrick longed to see them set free from bondage through the power of Jesus Christ.

For thousands of years the Druids had practiced their pagan rites in the British Isles. They believed in reincarnation - a view that people come back again and again to the earth

(sometimes as animals, or people, or trees). They did divination (telling the future) and used magic to cast spells. They worshiped nature and had rituals that were similar to the Brahmins of India, the Magi of Persia and the priests of ancient Egypt.

Patrick knew that a knowledge of the Creator God would set the Irish people free from fear and superstition. Although he believed preaching was vital for the growth of the new church in Ireland, he was convinced that education was perhaps more important in keeping truth alive. As he studied the Bible Patrick saw that godly schools produced godly workers for God. He read how Samuel had founded the schools of the prophets which were “to serve as a barrier against the wide-spread corruption, to provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of the youth, and to promote the future prosperity of the nation by furnishing it with men qualified to act in the fear of God as leaders and counselors” (*Christian Education* 61).

As Patrick worked among the Irish, he not only preached and built churches, he also constructed training centers which quickly became known as the nation’s best schools. Princes, merchants and other people of importance sent their children to be trained at Bangor, Clonard and Armagh where they were taught from the greatest book of all – the Bible.

The Itala Bible, which Patrick used in his evangelism and schools, was the first Latin translation of God's Word. It was a very early Bible - made over two centuries before the Roman Church would commission Jerome's Vulgate. Because there were no printing presses or other means of duplicating books, students at Patrick's schools spent time each week carefully copying Scripture by hand so others would have God's Word to study and memorize.

Since the people had hand-written copies of the Itala Bible, they knew truth for themselves. Parents taught their children to trust and worship the God who created the numberless stars in the heavens, the towering trees and delicate flowers. Unforgettable Bible stories of Moses, Daniel, Joseph, Paul and Peter created in the youth a missionary zeal. They wanted to share the stories of Jesus' great love for sinners with those still living in spiritual darkness.

The Celtic Church's doctrines were founded on the pure Scriptures safeguarded in Antioch. Patrick taught that on the cross Jesus died the death we deserve and that the Ten Commandments were to be honored and obeyed. Patrick's church kept Saturday as a day of rest, although they held special religious services on Sunday. We know that Patrick was married and he allowed his pastors to marry. In later years this solid Biblical foundation allowed Patrick's spiritual descendants to detect unscriptural teachings which were brought to Ireland by the Roman Church.

We are sorry to say that less than two hundred years after Patrick's death in AD 461, much of mainland Europe was descending into what we call the Dark Ages. We call it “dark” because the beliefs and practices of the Roman Church caused both education and true Bible piety to be suppressed. Without schools to teach reading and writing, and no study of Scripture to enlighten the mind and morals, people rapidly spiraled into the darkness of poverty, illiteracy and superstition.

In contrast to Europe however, Ireland was still known as the “land of saints and scholars.” For hundreds of years Ireland stood as a beacon of light because its people accepted the wisdom found in Holy Scripture. It is believed that Patrick established as many as 350 churches and that 120,000 people were converted through his tireless efforts.

Since Patrick taught doctrines that differed from the teachings of the Roman Church it seems strange that they should end up making him one of their saints – yet that is what they did. Many years after Patrick's death, when the Roman Church tried to win Ireland to her faith, she

found the nation's love for Patrick to be very deep and loyal. Rather than slander his name, they decided to create their own Patrick - one who was shrouded in mysticism. They circulated stories of Patrick making a stone float so a poor leper would have a ride to Ireland. They told of him chasing all the snakes out of Ireland and reported him bringing many relics from Rome, including a sheet with Christ's blood on it and wisps of Mary's hair. Little by little the real stories of Patrick were replaced by the fictitious ones.

Today the Roman Church associates the cloverleaf with Patrick's teaching of the Trinity. Their belief is that the Godhead – made up of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost – is “three Divine Persons in one body.” It is rather like the three-headed-monster god found in some of the South Pacific islands. However, we know that Patrick taught that when “death claimed the Son of God, [it] had left untouched the Father and Holy Spirit” (*Truth Triumphant* 94).

For over nine hundred years the church of Ireland kept their religion pure, but in the middle of the twelfth century she fell under papal rule. As one author put it, “In the centuries to follow, [Patrick's] legacy as a faithful Sabbath-keeper would quickly be shrouded with half-truths and mysticism due to the eventual overthrow of the Celtic Church. (The victor always writes history.)...Sadly, the truth behind his powerful work is twisted and dimly lit, but that doesn't mean the real truth can't be told....It is a lesson we should not forget. Ireland prospered in peace for centuries as it obeyed God's commands by [Patrick's] lead. After it incorporated unholy doctrines and practices, it fell into despair and was subjugated by oppression and cruelty” (Anthony Lester, *Amazing Facts Inside Report*).

The class sat silent for a moment before Carrie broke the silence. “Wow! Patrick sure accomplished a lot for just one life.”

“Let me read you a quote that I love from the book *Education*,” Mr. Dell responded. Retrieving a slim, green volume from his bookshelf he turned to page 17 and began reading: “Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator-- individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought.’

“This is what Patrick understood. His schools were a training ground for young people to develop their mind, to develop their ability to plan and make that plan a reality, and of course to develop a deep faith in God and His Word. His students went out as missionaries to spread light in the spiritual darkness around them.”

“This book is awesome, Mr. Dell. I never heard of most of these people before we started reading this book,” Aaron closed his binder. “I'm glad we're learning the real history about how God kept truth alive for all these years.”

“Knowing our spiritual roots helps us stay loyal and true to God,” agreed their teacher as he placed the book on his desk. “We truly have much to be grateful for.”

B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* (Teach Services, Brushton, New York, 1994) Chapter 7

Leslie Harding, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (Teach Services, Brushton, New York, 1995)

Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Pacific Press, Mountain View, CA, 1968)

Ellen G. White, *Education* (Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., Mountain View, CA 1903)