



The World After Christ, an LDS  
Perspective  
(0 A.D. - Present)

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## The Dutch Republic

The World After Christ, an LDS Perspective, Volume 3,

"The Dutch Republic", is found on pages 270-278.

In 58 B.C. Roman soldiers under Julius Caesar invaded what are now the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The Romans conquered much of the region, now called the *Low Countries*. The *Netherlands* means *Low Countries*, but the *Low Countries* also include Belgium and Luxembourg. During the 400's, Germanic people called Franks drove the Romans out of the *Low Countries*. The Frankish kingdom expanded under the rule of Pepin the Short and Charlemagne, but broke apart during the 800's. In 870, the *Low Countries* were divided between the East and West Frankish kingdoms, which later became Germany and France.

At first, the French and German rulers of the *Low Countries* paid little attention to the region. Local dukes, counts, and bishops became increasingly powerful, but during the 1100's, trade and industry began to expand rapidly in the *Low Countries*. Fishing, shipbuilding, shipping, and textile manufacturing became especially important. The French and German kings became interested in the *Low Countries* after the thriving trade developed. The towns, which wanted to stay free, supported the local nobles in struggles against the perceived foreign rulers.

Beginning in the 1300's, the French dukes of the province of Burgundy won control of most of the *Low Countries* through inheritance, marriage, purchase, and war. They promoted a central government, and political and national unity began to develop. In 1506, Charles V inherited the lands of the dukes of Burgundy. In 1516, he also became king of Spain, and was known as Charles I. In this way, the *Low Countries* came under Spanish control. Charles became archduke of Austria and emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1519. These seventeen low-lying provinces began to suffer under religious persecution of the Catholic-Spanish as the Reformation, more specifically Calvinism, took root in the Netherlands.

In 1548, Charles V made the seventeen provinces into a single administrative unit within his Hapsburg empire. (Hapsburg was the name of a ruling family of Austria & Austria-Hungary - 1278-1918, of Spain - 1516-1700, and of the Holy Roman Empire - 1438-1806.) Under Charles, the provinces had considerable autonomy. The towns, such as Amsterdam and the larger port city of Antwerp were controlled by wealthy merchant families jealous of their rights and privileges. In some rural districts, the local nobility dominated public life, but each of the seventeen provinces had its own administrative council called the *States*. These bodies, in turn, sent deputies to a central forum, the *States-General* in Brussels, which city the Hapsburgs had made their northern capital.

In 1556, Charles abdicated from power, and in the ensuing division of his kingdom, the Netherlands fell to his son Philip II, the king of Spain. Philip tried to impose his will upon his distant provinces without concern if his actions violated their traditional liberties. He sought to control their domestic policies, intervened in the appointment of their bishops, and reorganized the Catholic Inquisition set up by Charles V to persecute the Calvinist Protestants, whose beliefs were gaining ground throughout the north. Still worse, he imposed new and burdensome taxes in an effort to replenish his treasury drained by foreign wars.

Aroused equally in matters of religion and civil politics, the Netherlands rebelled and the battle for Dutch independence began. At their head, the rebels were led by William the Silent, called that because of his cautious nature. He was prince of Orange, a Protestant nobleman with large estates in Germany, as well as the principality of Orange in southern France, and extensive estates in various parts of the *Low Countries*. Against all odds, he forged an alliance among the divergent, often hostile groups of the *Low Countries*. His support was strongest in the north, where Calvinism had made the greatest gains. In 1579, under his leadership, the seven northern provinces solemnly bound themselves together in the *Union of Utrecht* (YOO trehkt), a prominent city of the Netherlands. Two years later, these united provinces declared their independence from Spain.

*A stalemate ensued. Philip's shaky finances were depleted by the war effort. With his ill-paid and ill-fed army in a state of near-constant mutiny, he never succeeded in stamping out the rebel forces – although his agents eventually managed to assassinate Prince William in 1584. Meanwhile, the Orangeists made a little headway against Spain, but they lacked the financial and military aid from Europe's other Protestant countries needed to consolidate their gains. Soon after William's death, however, [Queen] Elizabeth of England, fearful that Spain might regain control across the Channel, decided that the time had come for active intervention on the rebels' behalf. The Dutch now had at least one powerful ally. (TimeLife Books, TimeFrame A.D. 1600-1700, Powers of the Crown, page 115)*

In 1588, the *Spanish Armada*, sweeping up the Channel to invade England, was destroyed by the joint efforts of the English, the Dutch, and the weather. For the story of the *Spanish Armada*, see *The World After Christ, an LDS Perspective*, volume 1. Neither Spain's finances, nor its self-esteem, recovered from the blow. Philip directed his attentions to battles over the succession to the French throne, but by 1598 he was dead, and the Spanish were driven out of their last strongholds in the northern Netherlands. Devastating plagues and famines in Spain made it impossible for Spain to sustain anything more than a defensive war from its remaining lands it controlled in the southern provinces. It was not until 1609 however, that Spain proved willing to sign a truce. Twelve years later, hostilities were renewed, but Spain finally gave formal recognition to the independence of the seven northern provinces in 1648 by signing the *Treaty of*

*Westphalia* (wehst FAYL yuh). The southern provinces, geographically approximate to modern Belgium, were to remain in Hapsburg hands as the Spanish Netherlands until 1794.

Though not blessed by Spanish recognition, the seven northern *United Provinces* functioned as an independent political entity almost from the time of the *Union of Utrecht* in 1579. By the terms of the union, each province governed its internal affairs through the provincial *States*, while continuing to send delegates to the central *States-General* to debate matters concerning the union's collective interests. Within this assembly, the nobles of Holland – the richest and most populous province – generally spoke with the strongest voice. Trade was the trademark of the Dutch, and its importance to the newly developing nation is no better illustrated than the return trip of the first ships from the East Indies.

*On the face of it, there was nothing remarkable in the sight of four heavily laden cargo ships moving through the Zuider Zee [former arm of the North Sea, which extended into the Netherlands: its south section was shut off from the North Sea by dikes] and into the teeming port of Amsterdam. The city, in that year of 1599, drew its wealth and sustenance, as it had for generations, from seaborne trade. The tall brick warehouses lining the network of canals were crammed with all the goods of Europe: grain and fish, woolens and wine. The harbor was always full of traffic – a dense, floating forest of masts and rigging.*

*But on that July day when these vessels came home, Amsterdam celebrated with a fervor more commonly reserved for victory in war. Church bells pealed a message of triumph and thanksgiving that echoed even in the marshes beyond the town. Welcomed with pomp and ceremony, the ships' commanders and their commercial backers were regaled [treated as royalty] with a lavish banquet. Meanwhile, the junior crew members prepared to spend their wages in the town's notorious taverns and brothels.*

*As the city fathers rehearsed their laudatory speeches, the lightermen [dock workers] at the docks began to unload the precious cargo, releasing its pungency into the already-aromatic harbor air. The sacks emerging from the ships' bellies bulged with cloves and nutmegs from the East Indies, the fabled islands of spices on the far side of the world. The small, dark pellets might as well have been rubies: Counting-house clerks calculated that the expedition's backers would reap a 400 percent profit on their investment in the returning vessels, and four sister ships still awaited.*

*But the safe return of the Far Lands Company fleet was much more than a fat harvest for a few investors. For a community that lived by trade, this first successful foray to the distant East Indies was a turning point: a promise of untold riches, and a mark of heaven's favor. Such a sign of hope could not have come at a better time to a country engaged in a prolonged and bitter struggle for survival. (Ibid., page 113)*

The provinces appointed a military leader, the *stadholder*. The post had been established during the early years of the revolt, when William of Orange held the office. The stadholder's noble birth ensured him the military training and knightly prestige required for the job, but his lineage conferred no superior status. Sovereignty remained in the hands of the provincial States. Cooperation between the civil power and the stadholder was vital. After the death of William of Orange, his son Maurice of Nassau was named stadholder for Holland and Zeeland. His civil counterpart was Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, the leading minister of the republic. Their initial collaboration, in the last years of active combat against Spain and the early days of independence, was good. Maurice's military skills kept the Spanish at bay, while Oldenbarnevelt forged the policies that placed the union on a firm foundation and negotiated with friendly foreign governments.

Tensions between the two leaders were never far from the surface. However, Oldenbarnevelt represented the few who felt they were best suited to rule, while Maurice was closer to the Dutch nobility, some of whom hoped that the new state might become a monarchy under an Orange ruler. Yet he was also a hero to the common people, who resented the nobles who ran the towns, controlled the magistrates, and enjoyed the lion's share of the wealth.

*Maurice had not been in favor of the 1609 truce with Spain; his own preference would have been to fight until the enemy was hounded out of the southern provinces, too, and the whole of the Netherlands was free. In this, he had the support of the most zealously orthodox Calvinist clergymen, who now saw the conflict as a holy war against a papist [Catholic] foe. But Oldenbarnevelt, reflecting the pragmatic inclinations of his own constituency, supported the truce. It was time, he thought, to resume the business of amassing wealth through trade. (Ibid., page 117)*

It was religion that proved Oldenbarnevelt's undoing. When the struggle for survival against the Catholic Church represented by Spain was won, internal schisms threatened the young Dutch Reformed church. Two separate tendencies were at war within Dutch Calvinism, divided over, among other issues, the question of whether an individual's sins could keep him or her out of heaven. According to strict Calvinist doctrine, the precise number and names of God's elect had been set down for all time at the world's beginning, so personal morality could make no difference.

Oldenbarnevelt's faction, the *Arminians*, represented a more liberal school, which placed a higher value on individual thought and action. They favored a policy of greater religious tolerance, arguing against those who would have liked to see Catholics, Jews, and members of dissident Protestant sects purged from the land.

*Arminius [ahr MIHN ee uhs] Jacobus [1560-1609], was a Dutch theologian. He tried to liberalize severe Calvinist views on predestination, which stated that God unconditionally chooses some people to be saved and others to be damned. Arminius denied absolute predestination. He taught that predestination was based on God's knowing in advance who would believe in Jesus. But people can still resist the Holy Spirit's call to grace and even lose salvation. Thus, complete assurance of final salvation is impossible. Arminius' doctrines were called Arminianism.*

*Arminius' followers published a Remonstrance in 1610 that summarized his views. Orthodox Calvinists claimed that Arminianism would weaken Dutch national unity by dividing Calvinism, the national religion. A council called the Reformed Synod of Dort [1618-1619] condemned Arminianism. The doctrines still spread to England and the English colonies in America. Arminianism influenced other Protestant denominations, especially Methodism. (Arminius, Jacobus, *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1990)*

Matters came to a head in 1618. One winter's morning, five life-sized snowmen representing Oldenbarnevelt and four leading fellow liberals appeared on a street in The Hague. Gangs of boys began pelting them with stones and snowballs, chanting, "An Arminian is a plague on the land; his house is a nest of salamanders! Arminians to the gallows!" (TimeLife Books, *TimeFrame A.D. 1600-1700, Powers of the Crown*, page 118) Soon after, riots erupted in many towns. Oldenbarnevelt, on behalf of the States of Holland, passed an order allowing communities within the province to gather special militias to restore order. The States-General, dominated by anti-Arminians and under the influence of Maurice, ordered all the troops thus raised to be disbanded. Oldenbarnevelt was taken prisoner, and following a rigged trial, was beheaded as a traitor. Other prominent Arminians, including some of Holland's leading scholars and teachers, were purged, jailed, or exiled.

Oldenbarnevelt's execution proved to be only a temporary setback for the advocates of religious tolerance. Without a strong, centralized state capable of enforcing censorship, there was neither the will nor the political machinery to curb the circulation of dissident ideas. Each community had its own regulations on freedom of the press. What the printers of one town feared to touch, their colleagues in the next province would often happily publish. The liberty that the Dutch enjoyed from legislated religion was a rare luxury in Europe at that time. In other countries, to belong to a church that was not the state church was to suffer some loss of civil rights, if not outright persecution. Thanks to its religious tolerance, the Dutch republic possessed a climate of intellectual freedom unequalled anywhere in Europe.

The three most prosperous areas of the young republic were the three westward facing coastal provinces, where the inhabitants lived by fishing and sea trade. Holland, by far the richest and most populous, had the towns of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, while Friesland to its north handled the Baltic trade and the Norwegian lumber business, and Zeeland took care of the European trade.

For the Hollanders and Zeelanders, the sea was an enemy as well as a friend. For centuries, they had built dikes and other defenses to hold back its waters. The Dutch had of necessity become experts in the technologies of drainage, canal building, and land reclamation. Between 1590 and 1640, their efforts won them almost 200,000 new acres of agricultural land.

*"God created the world," went the saying, "but the Dutchman created Holland." Since the fifteenth century, the needs of a growing population had been met by a drainage system that won land from the sea for farming. The reclaimed acres, called polders, provided grazing and cropland. By the seventeenth century, the Dutch had become the world's greatest hydraulic engineers, using windmills to reclaim up to 4,500 acres annually. For drainage, an expanse of shallow water was enclosed by a dike, and a ring canal was built around it. Then the mills pumped the water up to the canal, from which it ran off into the sea. A stepped array of mills, each passing its output to the next, could drain a sheet of water fifteen feet deep. But the sea could always return. Despite careful maintenance, the web of dikes sometimes failed, and the engineers' steady progress was punctuated by occasional disastrous floods. (TimeLife Books, *TimeFrame A.D. 1600-1700, Powers of the Crown*, page 116)*

Even with all this work to reclaim and add more crop acreage to the Netherlands, they needed to import much of their grain and fish. Large quantities of grain were imported from the Baltic countries, and every year, from June to December, the boats set out from Holland and Zeeland on an enterprise known as the *great fishery*, to sweep up the hordes of herring moving down from the Baltic and into the North Sea. The Dutch fleet operated with great efficiency. Their specially designed vessels were large enough to house the crew throughout the six months of the season, and large enough to carry out the salting and packing of the fish on board. Instead of wasting time by returning to harbor, a fleet of smaller service boats shuttled between the ports and the fishing grounds, bringing out fresh provisions and taking away the barreled salted fish.

The business of fishing for herring was a rich money maker for the Dutch. The many fast days of Catholic Europe made fish a big business. Dutch shipping was the envy of seamen everywhere. The shipwrights of the Netherlands devised the finest cargo vessels of the age. They were cheap to build, where efficient mass-production techniques and the use of cranes as well as wind-powered sawmills kept labor costs down – and inexpensive to run. They needed fewer crewmen than other European craft: ten sailors could do the work of thirty on an English ship. Low wage costs and cheap provisioning meant that Dutch shipowners were able to undercut competitors' freight charges by as much as 50 percent. It made better financial sense for foreign merchants to buy or charter Dutch ships than to use their own.

At the forefront of all this business activity was the city of Amsterdam. Its major competitor, the southern port of Antwerp, suffered badly during the war with Spain, losing much of its trade to its northern rival. At the same time, Amsterdam benefitted from the large number of refugees who migrated into the northern towns. Some were Calvinists, drawn north on religious grounds; others saw a chance to improve their lives in a land that had freed itself from Spain. As a result of this, Amsterdam also became the financial center of Europe.

The Dutch preferred collective financial efforts to the single entrepreneur enterprise. To pool resources and reduce risks, investors formed sea projects. The pioneering East Indian spice fleet of 1599 was the fruit of one such joint venture. Cloves and nutmegs were native to the Moluccas – a handful of tiny islands northeast of Java, in Indonesia. For centuries, these spices had reached Europe via a chain of merchants who each undertook part of the journey. Untold wealth awaited any trader who could eliminate all the middlemen. That was the aim of nine of Amsterdam's wealthiest merchantmen, who had come together for a series of secret meetings to lay plans for the *Far Lands Company*, and take control of the spice trade.

In March 1602, three years after the success of their first expedition, as quoted earlier, the Far Lands directors formed an even larger consortium, the *United East India Company*. Its purpose was to eliminate wasteful competition between Dutch ventures and pool their resources to establish a monopoly of overseas trade in spices and in every other commodity. The East India Company did not expect to achieve these goals simply by offering better commercial terms. With the blessing of the nation's political rulers, its employees were empowered to wage war, conclude peace treaties, build forts, and recruit civil, military, and naval personnel, all bound by an oath of loyalty to the company itself.

*The Dutch East India Company was a powerful trading company that helped establish Dutch rule in what is now Indonesia. In 1602, the Dutch government granted the company a monopoly on trade between Asia and the Netherlands. The company also received broad governmental and military powers, including the right to rule territories and to wage war in Asia. By 1700, the company had gained control of the cinnamon, clove, and nutmeg trade in the East Indies. It had trading posts in many Asian countries and ruled parts of what are now South Africa and Sri Lanka and most of present-day Indonesia.*

*In the 1700's, the demand for textiles from India, tea from China, and coffee from Arabia and Java exceeded that for spices. The Dutch East India Company had strong competition from the English East India Company and other traders. The Dutch company lost money and was disbanded in 1799. (Dutch East India Company, World Book Encyclopedia, 1990)*

*The East India Company was the name of several European companies that opened trade with India and the Far East in the 1600's. East India companies were private enterprises given charters by the governments of England, the Netherlands, Denmark, and France. The companies received special trading rights from their governments. The British East India Company had the longest life – nearly 260 years – and the greatest influence. It opened India and the Far East to English trade and eventually brought India into the British Empire.*

*Before 1600, Portugal controlled most European trade with India and the Far East. The English company was formed in 1600, and soon began competing with the Portuguese. The Dutch company was formed in 1602. The Danish company in 1616, and the French company in 1664. During the 1600's, the Dutch and English companies seized most of the Portuguese holdings and drove most of the Portuguese traders out of India. The Dutch gained control of the islands that became the Dutch East Indies [now part of Indonesia].*

*To protect itself, the English company made agreements with the rulers of India during the 1600's. It carried on trade without trying to acquire territory. But in the early 1700's, the Mogul Empire, which had ruled India and given it political unity for about 200 years, began to break up. Many regional states emerged, and fighting often broke out among them. The English and French companies tried to improve their positions in India by intervening in Indian politics and taking sides in local disputes. In the 1740's and 1750's, the French tried to win control of India, but the British, under Robert Clive, stopped them. French influence in India ended in the early 1800's, when the French were at war in Europe [Napoleonic Wars from 1803-1815, and the Revolutions of 1830, and 1848]. British influence then spread quickly, without French interference.*

*Legislation passed by the Dutch government in 1798 caused the Dutch company, deep in debt, to disband the following year. In 1845, the Danish holdings in India were sold to the British company. The British company ruled India until the Sepoy Rebellion, a revolt led by Indian troops from 1857 to 1859. In 1858, as a result of the revolt, the British government took control of India from the East India Company. (East India Company, World Book Encyclopedia, 1990)*

Few areas of the world were left untouched by Dutch voyagers. The isolationist rulers of Japan were so impressed with the Dutch that they gave them exclusive rights to maintain a trading post on their territory, a monopoly that would continue until 1853. At the Cape of Good Hope, a settlement grew up to service the East Indian ships with fresh provisions. Within a few years, the independent-minded colonists, already known as *Boers*, were pushing out into the inner reaches of Africa. A North American colony, New Amsterdam, was established on Manhattan Island in 1611. In

1616, the Dutch won a foothold in South America, in western Guyana. The *Dutch West India Company* was subsequently set up to challenge the dominance of Spain and Portugal in the Caribbean.

*The Dutch West India Company was formed by Dutch merchants and chartered by the government of the Netherlands in 1621. The company was given trading and colonizing privileges for a period of 24 years in North America, the West Indies, and Africa. The colony of New Netherland included parts of what are now the states of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Connecticut. The colony was founded by the Dutch West India Company and had headquarters in New Amsterdam [now New York City]. (Dutch West India Company, World Book Encyclopedia, 1990)*

By the middle of the 1600's, the young republic's commercial supremacy was firmly established. Dutch merchants were at work from Siberia to the Cape of Good Hope. Closer to home, thirteen times as many Dutch ships as English ones passed through the Baltic Sea, carrying three-quarters of the Baltic countries' grain and timber, as well as half the metal exported from Swedish mines. The Dutch were becoming rich. Even families of moderate means had cabinets to display their china, with fancy cupboards to hold the household linens. The Dutch became obsessed with domestic cleanliness. Dutch housewives believed that the dirt of the world should never be allowed to cross the threshold of the home. The inside of their homes became immaculately clean, halls had polished tile, neat backyards paved in brick, and walled gardens.

*In the midst of this good living, the poor were not forgotten. Charity was a public duty and conducted – in the manner of many commercial enterprises – as a cooperative venture. Boards of male and female aristocrats supervised the almshouses, orphanages, and other institutions, which were supported by municipal funds and private bequests. Local magistrates or volunteer groups, including the chambers of rhetoric, sponsored vast public lotteries with a range of dazzling prizes to raise money for worthy causes. Items such as gold chains, silver tableware, and lace petticoats were raffled off to help build a new home for aged paupers in Haarlem, or raise funds for destitute widows in the flood-battered fishing village of Egmond aan Zee. Ticket sales could rise into the hundreds of thousands, and potential players with little money bartered goods instead: Sacks of peat, wheels of cheese, wine, textiles, and pictures were all grist to the lotteries' mill. (TimeLife Books, TimeFrame A.D. 1600-1700, Powers of the Crown, page 125).*

Whatever the hopes of its more enlightened inhabitants, the republic still fell far short of utopia. Large sectors of the population enjoyed no share of the newfound prosperity. In Friesland, about one percent of the population held nearly one-half of the region's wealth. In Holland and Zeeland, homeless beggars still wandered the streets, and workers and artisans struggled to feed their families. Throughout the republic, bad harvests and periodic bouts of inflation could bring some districts to the brink of famine, and an economy heavily dependent on foreign trade was vulnerable to any trouble in the outside world.

By the beginning of the 1700's, the golden age of the Dutch Republic seemed to be drawing to a close. The economy, though reasonably stable, had ceased to grow. Crippling taxation was sending skilled artisans and entrepreneurs out in search of more lucrative opportunities. European nations were becoming more self-sufficient and less dependent on Dutch traders. The eighteenth century would see the Dutch involved in prolonged wars over the succession to the Spanish and Austrian thrones, invaded by the French (1795-1813), and at war with the English (1652-1674; 1701-1714). The poor suffered under heavy taxation, and the wealthy retired to their estates and lived off of their investments. The Dutch seemed to be giving up on the virtues that had brought them success. They were becoming like the rest of Europe, but they had shown that a self-governing, republican state might not only survive but flourish beyond all expectations. (*The World After Christ, an LDS Perspective*, vol. 3, pages 270-278)