

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

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PART 4: SEEDS OF THE REFORMATION

THE RETURN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

From the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church in A.D. 325 to the church's awakening was a period of about 1,100 years. It is impossible to know all the men and women touched by the Holy Spirit in the interim. The Waldensians and Cathars were not able to break the iron grip of the Roman Catholicism. That would change when the "Morning Star of the Reformation" was born in England and shook Romanism to its dirty core.

JOHN WYCLIFFE

John Wycliffe was born in 1328 in village of Hipswell of Yorkshire on the eastern coast of England. There are no records of his parents, his childhood, and how he paid for his education at Oxford University.

The Black Death wreaked havoc from 1347 to 1351, killing about half of Europe's population – some fifty million – when Wycliffe was just nineteen years old.

The plague was caused by a micro-organism (bacterium) living in rodents. Fleas lived and fed on the infected rats, and when the host died, they jumped to humans and other animals, passing the infection.

It was not uncommon for whole villages to perish and the dead were left wherever they fell until the decayed bodies were determined safe for mass burial.

Wycliffe survived and developed a rather gloomy view afterwards on the survival of the human race. The pandemic did something to his soul and he began studying to become a priest, which he accomplished in 1351.

He met two Waldensian men in 1354 who came to England to spread what they called the "true Gospel." The Waldensians were a reformist movement that began in the late 1100s under Peter Waldo of Lyon, France. They emphasized poverty, preaching in the common tongue (anything but Latin), and reliance on Scripture – values that were similar to what Wycliffe would later promote.

The Waldensians refused to recognize the authority of local bishops who tried to control what they taught and preached. Pope Innocent III tried to suppress them through persecution, the Inquisition, and even military force. They fled to the mountains of northern Italy and southern France where they survived for centuries as an underground church.

Wycliffe's encounter with the two Waldensians had a deep impact on his faith and led to his translation of the Bible into English. He became more and more unhappy with the church and became critical of the following areas:



- ❖ The idea that the pope was supreme over all Christians.
- ❖ The authority of church councils, papal decrees, and tradition over Scripture.
- ❖ The immense wealth of the clergy. He believed that church officials who lived in sin or greed forfeited their authority.
- ❖ The doctrine of transubstantiation in communion. (The belief that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus.)
- ❖ Salvation requires a priest to mediate. (Versus approaching God directly)
- ❖ The sale of indulgences. (The practice of giving the church money or goods in exchange for salvation.)

Wycliffe criticized the pope's authority, the wealth and corruption of the clergy, the doctrine of transubstantiation, the sale of indulgences, and the requirement of priestly mediation, while insisting on the supremacy of Scripture and the right of all people to read the Bible.

He wrote a number of books and articles advocating the removal of the existing church hierarchy and replacing it with "poor priests" (priests who had taken a vow of poverty) who would actually preach the Gospel. This teaching gave birth to the "Lollard" movement, a derogatory term that was used to mock people thought to be overly pious, wandering preachers, or those chanting prayers quietly.

Wycliffe taught on the supremacy of Scripture. He said it was the only authoritative, reliable guide to the truth about God and it was superior to the tradition of Roman Catholicism. The Wycliffe Bible in English was completed in 1382. It was written by hand since Gutenberg's printing press did not come into being until 1450.¹

It is estimated that Wycliffe wrote about 200 works in Latin and English. Only a limited number of his original writings have survived. He had a following in England, but also in Bohemia. These followers brought copies of his writings to their homeland which would become the Czech Republic. This was the area into which John Hus was born.

There is no record that Wycliffe taught a person must be born again in order to be a Christian. Martin Luther's teaching that justification comes by faith alone cannot be found in his writings. Nor did Wycliffe advocate a priesthood of all believers.

These public outcries were reported to Pope Gregory XI who condemned him for questioning the authority of the church. Wycliffe was summoned to appear before the bishop of London in 1378 which resulted in a papal bull (public decree) that denounced Wycliffe as "erroneous and dangerous" to the church and society.

It is clear that God used John Wycliffe to challenge the monopoly of Roman Catholicism. The Devil managed to remove the Bible from the common people for more than a thousand years and God used Wycliffe to restore it to the English-speaking people.

¹ See the appendix for the full effect of the Wycliffe translation.

While Wycliffe was still a Roman Catholic priest who did not possess a clear understanding of salvation and the new birth in Christ, he did challenge Romanism's unbiblical church hierarchy.

JOHN HUS

John Hus was born in the village of Husinec in southern Bohemia in 1372. He was sent to a monastery at the age of ten because his father was dead and the monastery offered education and opportunity impossible for his poor family. He excelled at his studies, eventually moved to Prague to study at its namesake university where he earned two degrees and became a professor.

The university was a hotbed of anti-Catholicism by the late 1300s as a result of Wycliffe's criticisms of the pope, indulgences, and church corruption, which resonated strongly in Bohemia, where resentment of the wealthy foreign (German) clergy was already growing. This was a divisive matter because many of the most important and wealthy church offices in Bohemia were held by foreigners, many of whom were German.

Hus was deeply influenced by Wycliffe's writings and he adopted similar reformist ideas, using his position as a teacher to propagate and defend the writings of Wycliffe from 1398 to 1399.

Despite his fierce outbursts against Roman Catholicism, Hus was ordained a priest in 1400 because he still believed there was hope for the church. A year later he was hired as the dean of the philosophical department of the university. The following year in 1402 saw him promoted to rector (professor).

That same year he was also appointed preacher at Bethlehem Chapel, which famously did not use Latin in its services, preferring to use the Czech language so the common people could understand what was being said.

His sermons made him incredibly popular among the Czech people, but also put him in direct conflict with church leaders and Rome because he railed against the moral failings of priests and bishops and criticized the pope.

Hus's words were reported to Pope Innocent VII, and Zbyněk Zajíc, the Archbishop of Prague, was ordered to rebuke Hus and forbid him from making further attacks against clergy.

WESTERN SCHISM

The struggle for power within Romanism took a surprising turn back in 1309 when Pope Clement V moved the papal court from Rome to Avignon in southern France because he was a Frenchman. The next seventy years saw seven popes – all French – utilize Avignon instead of Rome.

Pope Gregory XI returned the papacy to Rome in 1378, and when he died, the conclave (the cardinals that gather to select the next pope) nominated Urban VI as the next pope because they were intimidated by the crowds waiting outside, demanding someone who was Italian and not French.

Pope Urban VI was harsh in his rule and alienated the very men who elected him. Claiming their first election had been made under duress, a group of cardinals declared Urban VI's election invalid and they held another conclave where they chose Clement VII, who promptly returned to Avignon, reviving the Avignon Papacy.

Urban VI was supported by England, the Holy Roman Empire, and much of Italy; whereas Clement VII was supported by France, Spain, Scotland, and Naples. This was the beginning of the Western Schism.

Looking forward to 1409, the Roman pope was Gregory XII and the Avignon pope was Benedict XIII. Efforts at reconciliation failed because neither pope wanted to resign. To resolve the deadlock, a group of cardinals from both camps convened the Council of Pisa, surprisingly deposing both Gregory XII (Rome) and Benedict XIII (Avignon), and elected Alexander V (Pisan line) to be the new sole pope of Roman Catholicism. Instead of solving the schism, the issue had become even more chaotic with a triple papacy!

King Wenceslaus IV of Bohemia was working toward becoming the next emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and needed the blessing of the pope among other things. He denounced Gregory XII (Rome) and ordered the clergy in Bohemia to remain neutral. Archbishop Zajíc ignored the king and remained faithful to Rome. Eventually, Wenceslaus IV transferred allegiance to Pope Alexander V (Pisan line), forcing Archbishop Zajíc to do the same.

As a leader at the University of Prague, John Hus publicly supported Alexander V (Pisan line) because the new pope promised to address church abuses. Archbishop Zajíc's support of Gregory XII (Rome) forced Alexander V to issue a papal bull ordering all of Wycliffe's books to be burned and forbidding Hus from preaching in unauthorized places like Bethlehem Chapel.

ROMANIST HATE

Hus refused to stop preaching and defended Wycliffe's teachings, which put him in open conflict with Alexander V's (Pisan line) orders, who died suddenly in 1410 and was succeeded by John XXIII (Pisan line). John Hus was excommunicated in 1411 and this made him a hero to the Czech people.

The Council of Constance in Germany was called by King Sigismund to end the chaos. Gregory XII (Rome) agreed to resign voluntarily in 1415. Benedict XIII (Avignon) refused to step down and was subsequently declared a heretic. John XXIII (Pisan line) was deposed (officially removed) in 1415 and the council elected Martin V as the sole pope in 1417, officially ending the Western Schism.

John Hus continued preaching in Bohemia even though he had been excommunicated. He was informed there would be a trial in of his actions and agreed to attend when Sigismund – the half-brother of King Wenceslaus IV of Bohemia – guaranteed his safety. Outside the protection of his patrons in his homeland, Hus was arrested by the Romanist and placed in prison because he was deemed a "flight risk."

He was put on trial by the kangaroo court and condemned as a heretic after he refused to recant of his correct biblical positions. He said, *"I would not for a chapel full of gold*

recede from the truth." Hus was stripped of his priestly garments and symbolically humiliated before they led him to the stake where he was chained by his neck to the stake, with ropes and iron securing his body. Large pieces of wood, bundles of sticks, and straw were piled up around him almost to the chin.

When urged to recant a final time, Hus responded, *"I call God to witness, that I have never taught or preached that which false witnesses have testified against me. The truth that I have taught, I am ready to seal with my blood."* The flames were lit from below and witnesses said he was singing hymns until the fire and smoke choked his voice.

The council also posthumously condemned John Wycliffe, ordering his writings burned and his bones exhumed and cast into a river.

Hus's death sparked outrage in Bohemia because King Sigismund had promised Hus safe conduct in Germany and failed to protect him. This severely tarnished his reputation in Bohemia, and after Wenceslaus IV's death in 1419, Sigismund's claim to his brother's throne sparked the Hussite Wars (1419–1434) against both the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, which Sigismund himself would later come to rule.

INDULGENCES

The sale of indulgences was one of most damning doctrines of Roman Catholicism. The rot of selling forgiveness started with the priests and went to the top as popes over the centuries always needed money to finance wars, build cathedrals, and increase the cash flow of the church.

It began with Pope Urban II around 1095 when he offered indulgences to anyone who went on crusade to the holy land against the Muslims. But then there was a shift toward those who made a donation to the church, which opened the door to monetary payments. Eventually indulgence preachers began to collect money in exchange for indulgence certificates to cover the cost of cathedrals and papal wars.

The sale of indulgences was used to fund the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. During 120 years of construction, nineteen popes came and went. It was inaugurated by Pope Innocent X and the final cost was estimated to 46.8 million ducats (5-8 billion dollars).² This spiritual theft was the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back, provoking Martin Luther's 95 Theses and sparking the Protestant Reformation.

The enormous rebuilding cost was mostly financed by indulgences, when thousands of hired merchants traveled across Europe selling forgiveness on behalf of God. The ignorant people were sold a false bill of goods and their hard-earned money went to this building project. It was only at death that they realized it was all a lie. They were not born again and the worthless paper purchased offered nothing in the way of remission of sin.

SUMMARY

The Spanish philosopher George Santayana stated "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

² A ducat was a gold coin used in Europe from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century.

The average American today is ignorant of Jewish history and he has no inkling as to what took place after the Book of Acts in A.D. 90. He has some knowledge of Martin Luther, but the power struggle within Roman Catholicism is unknown.

The teaching of Jesus and what took place with the early church after the day of Pentecost was lost to the general population after A.D. 325 when the Roman state church came into being and slowly gained control over Europe. Eventually, its heresy spread to Central and South America and wherever the Spanish and Portuguese governments established colonies.

The Romanist grip on nations and rulers was tight. Anyone questioning the divine authority of the papacy was censured and even killed. When the spotlight was shone on indulgences, it exposed the corruption of the papacy and death was usually the end result.

The Holy Spirit sought to awaken John Wycliffe and John Hus to the fact that a person needs to be born again in order to go to heaven. Both men denounced the pope's authority, condemned the clergy's wealth and corruption, rejected transubstantiation, opposed the sale of indulgences, and the necessity of priestly mediation. They upheld the supremacy of Scripture and affirmed the common people have the right to read the Bible.

John Wycliffe believed salvation came through God's grace in Christ. John Hus preached that salvation depended on faith in Christ rather than reliance on the corrupt clergy. But that was as far as they took the matter.

Martin Luther would go even further by declaring justification comes by faith alone. Humanity is not saved by works, penance, indulgences, or even participation in the sacraments. Salvation is a free gift of God's grace, received exclusively through faith in Jesus Christ. He rejected the teaching that salvation required cooperation with the Romanist sacramental system. These tenets would go on to become the hallmark of the Protestant Reformation. Luther established the "born again" concept that we preach today.

The awful truth is that the Gospel was not preached for 1,100 years. One generation after another belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, participated in its liturgies, but no was born again during this time period. Everyone perished in their sins and is in hell today – especially the popes!

We should be thankful that the Gospel was restored and that we are going to heaven because men and women some 600 years ago were willing to lay down their lives to restore the truth which had been lost over time.

Satan hates mankind. He has been attacking the human race for the last 6,000 years and he is directing his minions to destroy humanity and ensure they never hear about Jesus.

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully;

but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (2 Corinthians 4:1-4)

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?

APPENDIX

Wycliffe Bible (1382)

First complete bible in English. Translated from the Latin Vulgate since Hebrew and Greek manuscripts were not widely accessible in England at that time. Handwritten copies were spread secretly by the Lollards because owning an English Bible was a punishable offense and could lead to death.

Tyndale Bible (1526)

William Tyndale translated the New Testament directly from Greek and the Old Testament from Hebrew. He had access to the printing press; thousands of copies were distributed and his work shaped later English Bibles.

Coverdale Bible (1535)

Miles Coverdale completed the first printed English Bible building on Tyndale's work.

Matthew's Bible (1537)

The Matthew's Bible by John Rogers utilized Tyndale's text and carried the reform movement further.

The Great Bible (1539)

Commissioned under King Henry VIII; it was the first authorized English Bible and meant for public reading in churches and largely based on Tyndale and Coverdale's translations.

The Geneva Bible (1560)

Produced by English exiles in Geneva during Roman Catholic Queen Mary's reign. It was popular among the Puritans, used by Shakespeare, and carried by the Pilgrims to America. It was known for its study notes and portable size.

The Bishops' Bible (1568)

An attempt by the Church of England to replace the Geneva Bible, but it was never as popular.

The King James Bible (1611)

Also known as the KJB, but even more popularly known as the KJV.

Commissioned by King James I to unify English Christianity with one standard translation. It drew heavily on Tyndale's work and was influenced by Wycliffe's vision of an English Bible for the common people.

The KJV would go on to become the most famous English Bible, shaping English literature, faith, and language for centuries.