

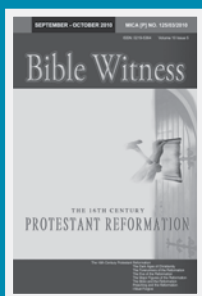
# Bible Witness



## THE 16TH CENTURY PROTESTANT REFORMATION

The 16th Century Protestant Reformation:

The Dark Ages of Christianity  
The Forerunners of the Reformation  
The Eve of the Reformation  
The Major Figures of the Reformation  
The Bible and the Reformation  
Preaching and the Reformation  
I Must Forgive



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# The Dark Ages of Christianity

## 10<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> Century

### Introduction

The few centuries prior to the 16th-century Reformation were dark times for the church. As the papacy and the ruling church rose in power across Europe, they cast a dark pall across the land. Corruption, doctrinal declension and gross immorality swept through the church, causing this period to become known as the Dark Ages of Christianity. It was dark because the light of the Gospel of Christ was all but snuffed out in this period, and because the darkness of sin had pervaded all ranks of the church - from the pope all the way down to the common folk.

Whilst the church continued to maintain a semblance of godliness and Christianity, it was all but a show put forth to deceive the laity. They sprinkled mentions of Jesus Christ and God and that was all. They were as Isaiah described in Isaiah 50:11: “Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.” They were as a people groping around in the darkness with only the sparks of their own kindled fire, with no true light of Christ and His Word guiding them. Nonetheless, God has graciously kept a remnant even in such times for the preservation and spreading of the truth.

### Immorality in the church

The papacy in this period exemplified the maxim that says “power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely”. As the papacy reached the zenith of power under Popes Alexander III and Innocent III in the 12th to 13th century, it also became absolutely corrupt. In those days, the pope was like the supreme ruler of Europe, where even the kings and rulers had to bow down to him. As a result, the popes were free to do as they pleased, with no authority over them to keep them in check, or to discipline them for the evils which they committed. Thus, it was a period of great immorality in the church.

They were supposedly Christ’s representative on earth, the so-called “most holy father” and “vicar of Christ”. Yet, the life that many of them led was worse than that of the common folk on the street. Despite the fact that the church required its clergy to be celibate, it was not uncommon to hear of popes fathering multiple illegitimate children, and keeping numerous mistresses and concubines. In fact, there is even an article on Wikipedia entitled “List of sexually active popes”<sup>1</sup>, which documents various popes in history who had been sexually active either before or during their reign as pope. Some of them listed were even alleged to have engaged in homosexual activity as well.

It was common amongst the clergy to hear of corrupt priests who had taken office simply for the power, prestige and money that it promised. The practice of simony (a term taken from Simon Magus in Acts 8:18) was common, where one would use money to purchase an office in the church. With no spiritual education or yearnings, they would lead immoral lives, engaging in all vices such as drinking, gambling and womanising. Of this period, Earle Cairns writes:

Corruption had spread through both head and members of the hierarchy of the Roman church. Self-seeking clerics bought and sold offices freely. Too many enjoyed sinecures, positions in which they received the salary but did none of the work usually associated with the office... Many priests lived in open sin or kept concubines... neglected preaching and visitation, being content to say the Mass, which they proclaimed as a magic rite that would bring grace to a person.<sup>2</sup>

With such rampant immorality and corruption during the Dark Ages, piety and holiness were attributes unmentioned and largely ignored by the church. It was indeed a sad period for the institution that was supposed to have been Christ's visible witness on earth. Instead of being the light that would shine before man, what came out from the church was darkness that enveloped the whole of Europe.

### Doctrinal deviation and declension

By the turn of the millennium, the Christianity that was being taught by the church was a far cry from the doctrines and teachings that Christ and the apostles had taught and practised. As the church turned away from the Word of God,

it began to place more weight upon traditions, the writings of the church fathers and declarations of the councils. Thus over time, heresies were introduced into the church one after another. There would be some dissenting remnant groups and individuals such as the Waldenses and the Hussites who would stand against the corruption and heresy of the church. However, they were quickly and cruelly snuffed out by the armies of the church. Thus up until the Reformation, the doctrines of the church were in a constant decline, sliding further and further away from the truths of God's Word.

Listed below are some of the theological errors of the church before the Reformation<sup>3</sup>:

*Seven sacraments:* Instead of just the two biblical sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, that Christ instituted, a total of seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, ordination and matrimony) were promoted as means of one's salvation.

*Transubstantiation:* Formally adopted by the church in the 4th Lateran Council of 1215. This taught that when the priest utters the words of consecration, the sacramental elements of bread and wine are mystically converted into the substance of the actual body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. This led to an idolatrous veneration of the Eucharistic mass, so much so that the wine was withheld from the laity for fear that they would defile the blood of Christ.

*Mary worship:* From the 5th century onwards, Mary began to grow in prominence in the church, rapidly becoming an object of worship. Over time, they declared her as "perpetual

virgin” who was bodily assumed to heaven. She was also given the titles “Mother of God” and “Queen of Heaven”, and prayers were written that were directed to her instead of God.

*Saint-worship:* Like Mary, numerous saints of the early church were also venerated and later worshipped. Pilgrimages would be made to the burial places of these saints, and holy days would be declared in remembrance of them.

*Purgatory:* A teaching drawn chiefly from the Apocrypha and tradition, purgatory is described as a place where men’s souls are detained in order to be cleansed by a “temporary punishment”. Thus instead of entering straight into heaven or hell after death, one’s soul will be sent to this temporary place for an indefinite period, until his soul is purified. Since it is unknown exactly how long a soul has to remain in purgatory, the living would have to pay for Masses to be continually said on behalf of the dead, and buy exorbitant indulgences to cut short the time spent in “purgatorial suffering”.

*Extreme unction:* Extreme unction is said to be the last rites that a priest would perform over one who is on his sickbed, on the brink of death. In so doing, the dying is purged of all his sins, and would have a chance to bypass purgatory and go straight into heaven.

*Auricular confession:* Confession demanded that every member of the church, from the Emperor to the peasant, was to make confession to the priest for the sins that he or she had committed. It was then up to the priest to decide what punishment, in the form of penances, must be meted out for the absolution

of the sin. Thus complete power was given over to the priest in deciding how one’s sins can be pardoned; and he could prescribe the most unreasonable penance, or withhold absolution of one’s sins.

*Indulgences:* The papal indulgence was one of the most profitable commodities of the church and was widely abused at the time of the Reformation. In fact, it was one of the main subjects that the reformers preached against. What the church taught was that there was a vast treasury of merit in Christ, Mary and the other saints, for they had more than sufficient merit for their own salvation. Only the pope had access to this treasury of merit which he could dispense at his discretion. Such merit was sold for money, allowing people to pay for the absolution of sins. This led to great corruption and immorality within the church as it promised remission of sins without repentance.

### The need for reformation

Having recounted some of the gross immorality and terrible doctrinal declension that were happening at that time, one would have to conclude that there was certainly a need for a reform of the church. What was needed was a complete overhaul of the whole Catholic system. There was an urgent need to return to God and His Word, for judging by the message propagated by the church at that time, it would have been almost impossible for one to know the way of salvation. Only by returning to the pure doctrines of God’s Word could anyone know about the grace and mercy of God; and that salvation is wrought by faith, and not by works.

Indeed the Holy Spirit was working, for at the close of the Dark Ages, there would be

forerunners of the Reformation, like John Wycliffe, John Huss and Jerome Savonarola who would stand up and preach against the errors of the papacy, and turn men and women back to Christ. The wheels were moving into place that would result in a complete reformation of the church. God, with His sovereign hand and divine providence, had ordered it such that when

Martin Luther pinned his 95 theses to the castle door at Wittenberg, nothing the pope or the church could do would stop the oncoming tide of the glorious Reformation that would turn men and women from darkness to God's marvellous light.



Ko Lingkang

### ENDNOTES

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_sexually\\_active\\_popes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sexually_active_popes)
2. Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1954), 281.
3. Summarized from Andrew Miller, *Miller's Church History*, (Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, 1999), 478-498.

## • 5 SOLAS OF THE REFORMATION

**Sola Scriptura (Bible Alone)** – *The reformers declared the Bible to be the only rule of faith and practice. They believed that God had made a revelation to men in written form in the Bible. They taught that the Bible was inspired by God and authoritative, and that it took precedence over the declarations of popes, church tradition and church councils. The Bible, hitherto written in Latin and read only by the clergy, was translated anew into the vernacular tongues of Europe and made a book of the people. Thus, the development of great Reformation Bibles culminating in the Authorised King James Version in the English language also came about because of this cardinal doctrine.*

**Solus Christus (Christ Alone)** – *Salvation is located not in the church which is an organization, but in the person which is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ actually secured and procured the salvation of all who are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.*

**Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)** – *The reformers believed that salvation was caused totally by God's grace. Man is not saved by works but by God's grace in Christ. No man deserves salvation; and if he is saved it is because of God's unconditional grace.*

**Sola Fide (Faith Alone)** – *Faith alone is consistent with God's grace in calling to salvation. Thus, the reformers taught that salvation was appropriated by faith alone. Good works could not save but only Christ can save those who believe in Him. Any and every person who trusts the Saviour will be saved, but even that person's faith is a gift from God.*

**Soli Deo Gloria (God's Glory Alone)** – *The underlying, foundational doctrine of the reformers was that God's glory was the ultimate purpose of all things. They held tenaciously to the doctrines of God's sovereignty in election, predestination and the efficacious call of God in salvation, and saw how these contributed ultimately to God's glory rather than to man's or to the church's.*



# The Forerunners of the Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was not a sudden uprising without any antecedent. Prior to Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 theses on 31st October 1517, the Lord had already been working in the hearts and minds of men and women all over Europe – people whom the Lord would use to pave the way for the Protestant Reformation. They were the forerunners of the Reformation.

Throughout history, God preserved a remnant who remained faithful to Him and His Word. As in the days of Elijah when God preserved seven thousand men in Israel who did not bow to Baal (cf. 1 Kings 19:18), God kept a remnant in the Dark Ages that preceded the 16th-century Reformation. Though, in those days, the Roman Catholic church with its false brand of Christianity was spreading throughout the world, God preserved remnant groups and individuals who separated themselves from the apostate church and continued to study

and teach the Word of God. Some of them can be traced as far back as the 12th and 13th century.

## **The Waldenses**

One such group was the Waldenses which was severely persecuted by the Roman Catholic church. In spite of this, the Waldensians stood firm on the truth for the cause of Christ and the Gospel. They stood so steadfastly that one writer said, "They must be amongst the most faithful of all the dissenters in the Middle Ages."<sup>1</sup>

The Waldensian movement was founded by Peter Waldo (†1218), the son of a rich merchant who lived in Lyons, France. Waldo was troubled because he gained his wealth through usury and he saw the worldliness in his own life. He asked his priest for the best way to get to God and he was told to sell all that he had, give to the poor and follow Christ. Peter Waldo listened to the priest and gave everything

to the poor. Since then, he followed Christ.

Around 1170, recognising that the Word of God ought to be the basis of his faith and practice, Peter Waldo started employing men to translate the Bible. Nine years later, he gathered a group of men and women who had the desire to bring the truth of the Bible to others. The members of this group were named the Waldensians after their leader. This group would take up the task of translating, teaching and preaching the Word of God.

Initially, the Waldensians followed some Roman Catholic teachings. They existed like a religious order of the Roman church under the authority of the pope. They observed the Catholic sacraments and followed their church system. However, as they continually and constantly studied the Word of God, they soon saw the errors of the Roman Catholic church.

In obedience to God's Word, they started to reject the doctrines of Catholicism. It was later recorded of them "that they did not believe in the doctrines of the church of Rome. That they made no offerings or prayers for the dead. That they did not go to Mass. That they did not confess, and receive absolution. That they did not believe in purgatory, or pay money to get the souls of their friends out of it."<sup>2</sup>

The Waldensians believed and were convinced that the preached Word of God (and not the sacraments) was necessary for salvation. They saw the need for all of God's people to have the Word of God. They translated the Scriptures into the vernacular language of the people so that everyone might read and preach from it. Consequently, their opposition to the Roman church and their insistence on preaching the Word of God stirred up the wrath of that church.

This resulted in the Inquisition, which was a cruel and severe persecution campaign against the Waldenses – one of the most ruthless persecutions in history which lasted for

centuries. So vehement was the hatred of the Roman church against the Waldensians that Pope Alexander III commanded the bishop of Lyons to exterminate them "from the face of the earth"<sup>3</sup>.

In order to escape persecution, the Waldensians fled to the Piedmont Valleys for refuge. These valleys still remain today as a testimony of their endurance of the most horrible persecution for not renouncing their faith in Christ. In 1655, God used Oliver Cromwell to deliver them from persecution – this after more than 400 years of cruelty and oppression from the Roman Catholic church.

It was indeed a mighty act of God's providence that even during the Dark Ages of the church, there was a remnant who still saw the truths of Scripture so clearly. They were so convicted by the Word of God that no amount of persecutions would cause them to deny their faith.

### The Albigenses

Another group that fiercely opposed the Roman church was the Cathars. This group is more commonly known as the Albigenses,

named after the town of Albi in southern France where they originated. The Cathars had its beginning in northern Europe around 1140 before they shifted south and established themselves in northern Italy and Languedoc. By 1200, with the support and protection they received from the French nobles, they became a powerful group. In their opposition to the Roman church, this was said of them, "It was the Albigensians that aroused the greatest anxiety and hostility from the Catholic church."<sup>4</sup>

Little is known about the doctrines and practices of the Albigenses. Because of the ferocious persecution unleashed upon them, many of their writings were destroyed. They have often been charged with teaching the heresies of Manichaeism and dualism. However, this accusation has not been verified even till today. These charges of heresies were often invented by their Roman persecutors to discredit their teachings.

Archbishop Ussher said of them that the charge "of Manichaeism on the Albigensian sect is evidently false". William Jones, a church historian,



concluded. He wrote "... that the general body of the Albigenses received the doctrines of Peter Waldo – that these doctrines had no connection with Manichaeism – and that the Waldenses and Albigenses were two branches of the same sect, inhabiting different countries, each deriving its appellation from its local residence"<sup>5</sup>.

If the Albigenses had the same doctrinal stand as the Waldenses, it was no wonder it brought great displeasure to the Roman church. Thus it prompted the church to organise the Albigensian Crusade to get rid of all the Albigensians by force. This crusade brought great bloodshed. In the process of getting rid of the Albigensians, they also destroyed France.

The Albigensians shocked the Roman church, for the latter was reminded that there were people who dared to oppose the church in order to stand for what they believed in. There were other groups such as the Lollards and the Hussites which were founded later, under the influence of John Wycliffe and John Huss respectively.

## **John Wycliffe**

Wycliffe was known as the Morning Star of the Reformation. He was born in Ipreswell, Yorkshire, and lived from 1324 to 28th December 1384. He studied theology and ecclesiastical law at Oxford. For the early part of his life, Wycliffe was mainly an Oxford schoolman.

Wycliffe's public career coincided with the time during which nationalistic anti-papal sentiments and anti-ecclesiasticism were brewing among the English people. This dissention was due to their reluctance in having papal taxation brought to England. This greatly influenced Wycliffe's views on papal authority.

From 1374, he had become more active in religious reform in which he rose to stand against the pope. Wycliffe sought to remove the Roman church's immoral clergymen, confiscate ecclesiastical property and refute her false teachings. 1378 marked the year in which he inaugurated himself as a doctrinal reformer.

Wycliffe introduced many theological and practical reforms. He preached against the pope, bishops

and friars, and warned the people against the deceptions of the Roman church. He condemned the teachings of indulgences, transubstantiation, and the false ideas behind pilgrimages and papal infallibility. He was the first to call the pope "Antichrist". Some of Wycliffe's accusations against the pope were directed at "his usurpation, his infallibility, his pride, his avarice, and his tyranny"<sup>6</sup>.

Church historian Philip Schaff says, "His assault may be summarized under five heads: the nature of the church, the papacy, the priesthood, the doctrine of transubstantiation and the use of the Scriptures."<sup>7</sup> Wycliffe further taught that Christ, and not the pope, is the head of the church; the Bible, and not the pope, is the sole authority of life and truth; and that the church should follow the example of the New Testament church.

Through sermons, tracts, pamphlets and other writings which were penned with much conviction and passion, Wycliffe reached the hearts of the people in his bid to break down priestly pretensions. He also exalted preaching and

attempted to bring the pure Gospel to the people. Around 1380, Wycliffe began a movement against the friars. He trained “poor priests” – also known as the Lollards – from Oxford graduates and laymen, and sent them forth as itinerant evangelists to spread the Gospel of Christ. This movement inspired a rapid spiritual reformation.

One of the most significant contributions Wycliffe made to the church was his translation of the New Testament into English from the Latin Vulgate in 1382. He wanted to see that the Bible was accessible to the common English people. During the same year, his views were condemned in London and he retreated to Lutterworth. There, he never stopped labouring to spread the truth of God.

Wycliffe died of a stroke on the 28th of December 1384 but his influence did not die with him. The Lollards’ preaching of the Gospel of Christ would reach Bohemia, where it would influence a man named John Huss.

### John Huss

Huss was born of Czech parents in 1369, in Southern

Bohemia. He studied at Prague where he earned several degrees. In 1400, he was ordained priest, and the following year, he was appointed preacher of the Bethlehem Church in Prague and later became the Dean of Philosophy.

Having been influenced by the teachings of Wycliffe, Huss strongly defended and promoted the Gospel of Christ. In 1405, Pope Innocent VII forbade the propagating of Wycliffe’s writings and his views, and renewed the condemnation of 45 articles of Wycliffe’s teachings. Huss’ refusal to submit to this prohibition resulted in him being stripped of his position as a synodal preacher.

Under the rule of Alexander V, the archbishop further accused the Lollards of instigating all ecclesiastical disturbances in Bohemia. Thereupon, the pope issued his bull (a papal decree) on December 20, 1409, that all books of Wycliffe were to be surrendered, his doctrines revoked and free preaching disallowed. John Huss protested in vain but he did not give up preaching and teaching the truth.

Huss’ teachings were very similar to that of

Wycliffe’s. He preached against indulgences; he taught that the church was not the Roman church, but the universal body of believers; Christ, and not the pope, was the head of the church; people should be permitted to read the Bible in their own language; the Scriptures, not the pope, was the final source of authority and truth; and church membership and office did not guarantee salvation. Because of his teachings, Huss was excommunicated a year later and went into exile. He, however, never ceased to champion the preaching of the Gospel of Christ.

His strong anti-papal views resulted in him being summoned before the Council of Constance. Accompanied by Bohemian nobles and promised safe conduct, Huss set off for his journey on October 11, 1414, and reached Constance on November 3. However, after a few moments with the cardinals, he was soon imprisoned in the Black Friars’ convent without any fair trial. Though he was severely ill-treated there, he still wrote tracts and letters.

After many prison transfers and hearings before kangaroo courts,

Huss was condemned to be burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. Wycliffe's manuscripts of the Bible were used as kindling for the fire. John Huss never recanted. Instead, his last words were full of boldness and faith. He said that there would arise a man whose call for reformation could not be suppressed.

His words turned out to be prophetic. About a hundred years later, Martin Luther would realise that the teachings of Huss were very

similar to his own, so much so that he was charged by the Catholic theologian, John Eck, to be a Hussite during their Leipzig debate. When Luther examined Huss' writings, he returned and declared loudly, "I am a Hussite!"

God had paved the way for the ushering in of the Reformation movement through these men amongst others. They were the sparks that set off the flames of the Reformation. What Martin Luther did

on the 31st of October 1517 officially marked the beginning of the Reformation movement, but let us not forget that God had always been working in history even before Luther was born – by preparing the hearts and minds of men and women who would receive and defend the truth of the Gospel even at the cost of their lives.



Joshua Yong

### ENDNOTES

1. Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, (Greenville: Michigan, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1999), 97.
2. John Fox, *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, (Electronic Edition: E-Sword 7.98), chapter 6, part 1.
3. *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, chapter 4.
4. N.R. Needham, *2000 years of Christ's Power - Part II: The Middle Ages*, (London, Grace Publications Trust, 2000), 311.
5. William Jones, *The History of the Christian Church: From the Birth of Christ to the XVIII. Century: Including the Very interesting Account of the Waldenses and Albigenses*, (London: R. W. Pomeroy, 1832) p. 318
6. Fox, chapter 7.
7. Schaff, 6:10.

*"Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the pope nor the councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound captive to the Word of God: I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other, so God help me!"*

*(Martin Luther when asked to recant his writings before the Diet of Worms)*

# The Eve of the Reformation

Tumultuous centuries preceded the onset of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. It was a period in church history when the simple faith and the true Gospel of Christ were hidden within a maze of falsehood and idolatry. The earnest hope and the fervent love of the early New Testament church were nowhere to be seen inside the ruling Roman Catholic church. It was a grim picture and the condition of the church was disgraceful – laden with immorality, greed and corruption.

Superstition stood out with the acceptance of the doctrine of indulgences, purgatory, church relics and Mary worship. For one to be saved, faith in Christ and His saving work on the cross were no longer enough. It must be augmented by these beliefs and by doing good works.

People were blindly following the false teachings and traditions of Romanism without consulting whether they were in harmony with the Scriptures. Forgiveness of sins could be bought through indulgence tickets. Catholic masses for the living and the dead could purportedly deliver souls from an imaginary place called “purgatory”. The mediation of Mary and the so-called Catholic saints were also required for deliverance. All ways and means for the forgiveness of sins and salvation of souls were said to be dispensed only by the Roman Catholic church.

With these developments, the leadership in the Roman Catholic church became very powerful and moved towards becoming very abusive and corrupt. Those who opposed her unbiblical teachings and practices were handed over to church tribunals to be punished and had their properties confiscated. Not a few were imprisoned, tortured, and some eventually died by being burnt at the stake. This was the period when the popes asserted absolute power and authority over all phases of life in medieval Europe. The situation was not unlike the one spoken of by Isaiah the prophet in the first fifteen verses of chapter 59. “Yea, truth faileth...” indeed (Isaiah 59:15a).

However, the abuse of such power would soon result in an uprising as opposition steadily grew inside and outside the Catholic church. The same power would cause infighting all the way to the top of the Catholic hierarchy as several factions would grapple for the papacy. Just as the night is darkest before dawn, so was the church in thick darkness before the dawning of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation.

Aside from the departure of Roman Catholicism from Biblical Christianity, several events contributed to the inevitability of the Protestant Reformation. When we consider the circumstances of the pre-Reformation era, we can see how marvellously the providence of

God orchestrated that great historical revival in the Christian church.

### Catholic and chaotic

The Great Schism (1378-1417) and the Catholic Reforming Councils (1409-1449)

A period known as the “Babylonian Captivity” of the Roman church came about when the papacy became French and the seat of power moved from Rome to Avignon in France. It centred on unmistakable extravagance in Avignon until finally Gregory XI, the last of the Avignon popes, returned the papacy to Rome before he died. The College of Cardinals met, and under pressure from the Roman people who wanted a pope in Rome again, they elected an Italian to serve as pope. But as soon as most of these cardinals (who were French) got out of Rome, they annulled that election and elected another pope in Avignon.

For nearly 40 years, there were two popes in bitter rivalry – one in Rome and one in Avignon. This was one of the greatest scandals in the history of the papacy which is known as the Great Schism. The problem was that each pope would excommunicate the other pope and then place all the people who were following that pope under an interdict.<sup>1</sup> This meant that eventually everybody in Christendom was excommunicated! It was a tragedy for the people in Europe and for Christianity in general.

**The Council of Pisa (1409)** was convened by the church to solve the problem. It elected a new pope, opposing both the Roman pope and the Avignon pope. However, neither of the two popes was impressed with the decision of the Council of Pisa. Rather than solving

the problem, the situation got worse because both popes would not resign and recognize the newly elected pope. The church was now divided among three popes, all claiming authority. They were being referred to as the “cursed trinity” because there were three popes – in Pisa, Avignon and Rome – all anathematizing and excommunicating one another.

**The Council of Constance (1414-1418)** was finally called by Sigismund, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and John XXIII, the reigning pope in Pisa. It carried a threefold purpose: 1) to end the Great Schism, 2) to quell the alleged heresies of the pre-reformers and order the execution of John Huss, and 3) to reform the church from the head to the members.

During this council, Gregory XII (Rome) resigned; Benedict XIII (Avignon) and John XXIII (Pisa) were deposed after a year amidst much negotiation. Martin V was elected the new pope by the council. With this, the papacy was reestablished solely in the Roman Catholic church which has since continued to the present.

**The Council of Basel (1431-1449)** was brought about by the unrest in Bohemia as a result of John Huss’s martyrdom, and the need for continued reform within the church. However, it was met with opposition from the reigning pope, Eugenius IV, whom it deposed from the papacy. Eugenius called his own council in Florence and proceeded to declare the seven sacraments to be accepted by the Roman church; it was promulgated by Eugenius IV himself in a papal bull. These were the very same sacraments called into question by those who clamoured for internal church reform.



The Council of Basel later acknowledged defeat and gave up the movement to reform the church by dissolving itself in 1449. Thus the attempt to reform the Roman church leadership came to an end and the papacy reverted to the system of papal despotism which had been in practice for many centuries. From this time, the Protestant Reformation was inevitable. All the internal squabbles of the papacy were just a preview of the rising tide of opposition that would soon shake Christianity in the centuries that followed.

### Artistic and aesthetic

The Golden Age of the Renaissance (ca. 1350-1650)

The onset of the Renaissance and the age of Humanism also hastened the coming of the Reformation. “Renaissance” is a word that means “rebirth of learning”. It is a movement that began in Italy in the 14th century and later influenced northern Europe in the 16th century. It was a period of great learning characterized by a renewed interest in the classics – literature, arts, music and even science.

Classics were the old writings of the Greeks and Romans, which include the writings of the Scriptures. The people during this period emphasized the importance of reading these writings in the original languages. So the study of Hebrew, Greek and ancient classical Latin became very important to the men of the Renaissance. This opened up the people’s mindset to new philosophies and ideas that were once so enslaved to the teachings of the medieval religion of Romanism. The Renaissance contributed largely to the coming of the Reformation in these areas:

**Biblical humanism** – Humanism refers to the study of languages which includes the study of the Scriptures as well as the classics in the original languages. This branch of learning is what is now more generally known as “liberal arts”. Some of the important biblical humanists among others include:

Reuchlin (1455-1522) who made a scientific study on the Old Testament and produced a combined Hebrew grammar and dictionary called *Of the Rudiments of Hebrew*. This work, completed in 1506, helped others become familiar with the biblical Hebrew language and to study the Old Testament in the original language.

Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1466-1536) whose most important work was the first printed Greek New Testament published in 1516. The influence of this work was tremendous because scholars were then able to make a comparison between the church at that time and the church in the NT times based on the Scriptures. He also wrote the books *In Praise of Folly* (1511) and *Familiar Colloquies* (1518) to expose the abuses of the Roman Catholic church and denounce the ignorance, idleness and immorality of the monks.

John Colet (ca. 1466-1519) was part of the group in England known as the Oxford reformers. He began to develop the literal meaning of the Pauline Epistles in his lectures. Before this, theologians had been more interested in allegorizing the Scriptures than in bringing out their literal interpretation.

**Invention of printing** – In the 1450’s, a man named Johann Gutenberg discovered how to mould movable metal type for



printing. This invention in the 15th century began to revolutionize the dissemination of knowledge. Printing increased the quantity of books, helped eliminate errors and gave scholars identical texts to work with. For the first time, printers could mass-produce literary works. Bibles and books became more accessible and affordable; they were being distributed all over Europe as their prices plummeted. On the other hand, the new printing press was also reportedly responsible for the mass-production of indulgence tickets for the church to sell.

**Rise of universities** – The Renaissance brought an important phenomenon in the rapid growth of universities and learning institutions. It provided education for a greater number of people, reducing ignorance and promoting literacy in general. This provided a means whereby the leaders of the new generation could be reached with Reformation principles, wherein they could be trained to promulgate them.

**Arts and architecture** – The onset of the Renaissance also fostered the love for aesthetics. Men like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo became famous for their works of art. In 1508, Michelangelo was commissioned by Pope Julius II to decorate the famous Sistine Chapel in Vatican which was constructed between 1472 and 1481 by the architect Giovanni de Dolci. The Sistine Chapel is the pope's own private chapel, where important papal ceremonies are held and where, upon the death of a pontiff, the College of Cardinals gathers to elect his successor.

### ENDNOTES

1. An interdict is a ban imposed by a pope, church council, or bishop that excludes a person, group, or nation from the sacraments of the Roman Catholic church. In the past, the interdict was used to enforce obedience to church superiors.

Did arts and architecture influence the Reformation in any way? Yes, and very significantly, too. Certain popes were great patrons of arts and architecture, so much so that they would not hesitate to flaunt extravagance in building and beautifying their cathedrals. Thus, the Roman Catholic church's coffer was depleted rapidly by such extravagance. This became a major factor later on when Pope Leo X sanctioned the sale of indulgences. This was done in order to finance the lavish construction of what is now the magnificent St Peter's Cathedral in Rome which is the official residence and throne of the papacy.

The selling of indulgence tickets would soon raise howls of protests from the reformers, most notably and perhaps, most loudly, from Martin Luther's 95 theses. It is interesting to know that the outcry for reformation did not only come from without, but more remarkably, it came from within the Roman Catholic church. Not a few of the Protestant reformers were either Catholic monks or priests, Luther included.

Thus several factors of political, economic, intellectual, moral, social and theological natures worked together providentially and contributed largely to the cause of the Reformation. These factors heightened the clamour for changes in the corrupt medieval church. With these factors in place, the conditions were ripe for the onset of the historic 16th-century Protestant Reformation.



**Richard Tiu**

# The Major Figures of the Reformation

The 16th-century Protestant Reformation is a living testimony of God's commitment to uphold His Word and preserve the purity of His church amidst an era of widespread spiritual decadence in Christendom. The Lord raised faithful men to purge and reform the church that had gone wayward far too long. Among those whom God raised up for this purpose, three stand out because of the extent of their contributions to the cause of the Reformation. They are Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin.

## **Martin Luther and the 95 theses**

Of the three, Martin Luther is considered to be the "Father of the Reformation". Born on the 10th of November 1483 in the mining town of Eisleben in Germany, Luther was brought up in a Catholic family. He studied advanced Latin and was educated in the philosophy of Aristotle. In 1505, he took up law at the University of Erfurt.

After a summer vacation, on his way back to school to continue his studies, Luther was caught in a severe thunderstorm in the dark woods near Stotternheim where he almost lost his life. When a lightning bolt hit a nearby tree, he was knocked to the ground. The dagger that was tucked under his belt seriously wounded his thigh, barely missing an artery. Being afraid to die, he cried out to St Anne, the patron saint of the miners. "St Anne, help me. I will become a monk!" Two weeks later, he

quit his studies at the College of Law and joined the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt.

In 1507, at the age of 24, he was ordained an Augustinian priest and celebrated his first mass. In 1511, his holy order sent him to pursue a Doctorate of Theology at the University of Wittenberg. The following year, he completed his Doctorate and became a professor of the Bible in that university. He was then 29 years old.

Being a lecturer of the Bible, Luther had to spend much time reading the Word of God. While he was reading and meditating on the words of Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith", he understood that justification is by faith in Christ alone. He realized that none can be justified by works, but by faith in Christ alone. This good news of salvation brought him great joy. He was delighted to find the answer to his life's greatest question – "How can man get right with God?"

Later, when he heard that a Dominican friar named John Tetzel was selling indulgences in Saxony, he could not afford to keep quiet. He was so enraged with holy anger that he wrote no less than 95 theses (or statements) in his protest against the sale of indulgences. These also included his rejection of the Roman Catholic church as the "institute of salvation for souls". Thus Luther was not just protesting against the peddling of forgiveness tickets but the whole system of the Roman Catholic church. Warfield rightly said of Luther, "He calls in question the entire basis of

the Catholic system and came forward in opposition to it, as an Evangelical.”<sup>1</sup>

It was customary in those days to post theological propositions open for debate on the door of the Wittenberg church, the gateway to the university. Many people passing by read Luther's theses and were convicted of the truths embedded in the statements. Others took a copy to the printing press and circulated hundreds of copies to their relatives and friends.

Little did Luther know that God would use his humble effort to launch and lead the historic 16th-century Protestant Reformation! It is remarkable to note that he was only 34 years old at that time. Today, God continues to look out for men like Luther who are totally committed to His cause for the sake of His truth.

## Ulrich Zwingli and the sovereignty of God

Ulrich Zwingli started the Reformation in German-speaking Switzerland. He was born on the 1st of January 1484 in the mountain town of Wildhaus to a considerably rich and influential family. His father was the magistrate of the town and a successful farmer. His parents noticed his exceptional abilities from an early age and they sent him to reputable schools. He studied in the University of Vienna (Austria) and later in the University of Basel (Switzerland). He was a scholar of broad discipline, a learned man in humanities, classics, languages, philosophy and theology. He was an accomplished musician too, who could play a variety of instruments.

Upon graduation in 1506, he joined the priesthood and for 10 years was loyal to the interests of the pope. By 1516, Zwingli

was assigned to serve in Einsiedeln. In this parish, the truth of God's Word reformed his life and theological thinking. Through his quest for the knowledge of God in His Word, he understood that salvation is purely by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

In the summer of 1518, Samson of Milan, the 'Tetzel of Switzerland', tried to enter Zurich to sell forgiveness tickets. Zwingli strongly protested before the civil government and managed to persuade them to ban Samson's false gospel. As Van Halsema recounted, "Zwingli preached so mightily against him that Samson could not get permission to enter the city of Zurich. Instead, Zurich invited Zwingli to become the parish priest in its Grossmunster Church."<sup>2</sup>

Zwingli's contribution to the 16th-century Reformation was twofold. Firstly, he managed to reform the German-speaking cantons which became Protestant through his preaching and writing ministry. At the end of his life, his literary efforts totalled eight large octavo volumes, eighty German and fifty-nine Latin books and tracts, and two volumes of letters from his correspondence. The most famous were his *Sixty-Seven Articles* (1524), *True and False Religion* (1525), *Treatise on Divine Providence* (1530), and *Confession* (1531).

Secondly, Zwingli developed a sound biblical theology based on the Greek New Testament which Erasmus had published. The objective principle that formed his reformation and theological views was *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone) built upon *Sola Scriptura* (Scriptures Alone). This led him to propound a Christ-centred theology. He proclaimed that Christ is the head of the church, visible and invisible, and the only mediator between God and man. He emphasized the authority of the Bible,

the understanding that salvation is by faith alone, the commemorative view of the Lord's Supper as against Luther's consubstantiation, and the belief that infants born to Christian homes are saved when they die an untimely death.

One of his major contributions to theology was the propagation of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. By this, Schaff accounted that Zwingli believed that God "is the supreme and only good, and the omnipotent cause of all things. He rules and administers the world by His perpetual and immutable providence, which leaves no room for accidents... Salvation is possible without baptism, but not without Christ. We are elected in order that we may believe in Christ and bring forth the fruits of holiness"<sup>3</sup>.

All of Zwingli's doctrinal efforts were rewarded in that he managed to remove the traditional practices of the Roman Catholic church such as the veneration of images and relics; payment for baptism and burials; and the prohibition of clergymen marrying, leading to the abolition of the mass in Zurich in 1525.<sup>4</sup>

Zwingli died at the Battle of Cappel in 1531. He did not leave us a denomination like Luther and Calvin but his influence extended beyond denominational barriers and his contribution to the 16th-century Protestant Reformation was so invaluable that one historian said, "The dogmatic works of Zwingli contain the germs of the evangelical Reformed Theology."<sup>5</sup>

### John Calvin and TULIP

If Luther was considered the father of the Reformation, then John Calvin was the mastermind of that 16th-century

movement. He was the youngest of the three major figures of the Reformation and considered a second-generation reformer; but God reserved a place for him that is higher than that of his seniors. He earned the title "theologian of the Protestant church", being one who systematized the Protestant faith. His contribution to the Reformation influenced not only the church but also shaped the Western world.

Calvin was born on the 10th of July 1509 in Noyon, Picardy in northeastern France. Raised in a middle-class family, his father served the Roman Catholic church as an attorney, but his mother passed away when he was only three years old. God blessed Calvin with remarkable intelligence and he is considered one of the most intelligent persons in the 1500s.

Calvin enjoyed the mentorship of the best teachers around. He studied classics, philosophy and theology at the University of Paris. Under his father's influence, he left Paris to study law at the University of Orleans and later at the University of Bourges where he finished his Doctors of Law.<sup>6</sup> After his father's death, he continued his studies in theology, his greatest passion. He also sought mastery of the original languages of the Bible, both Greek and Hebrew, to be more equipped in studying the Word of God.

John Calvin's contribution to the Reformation was monumental. Firstly, he founded the Academy of Geneva which trained the next generation of church leaders who would carry his reformed thought to faraway lands. There were men like Guido de Bres who wrote the *Belgic Confession*; Caspar Olevianus and Zacharius Ursinus who wrote the *Heidelberg Catechism*; John Knox who

wiped out Roman Catholicism in Scotland; John Foxe who wrote the *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*; Anthony Gilby and William Wittingham who translated the *Geneva Bible*. We also must not forget Theodore Beza who succeeded Calvin and edited the Greek New Testament *Textus Receptus*; and Miles Coverdale who completed the work of William Tyndale and published the first Bible in the English language.

Secondly, Calvin was a prolific writer. He left us a voluminous set of Bible commentaries on most books of the Bible. In addition, there were fifty-seven volumes preserved from his *Corpus Reformatorum* and a copy of two thousand sermon extracts.

Thirdly, Calvin left us a rich legacy in the Reformed Faith, also known as Presbyterianism or Calvinism. This theological school of thought was the fruit of his theological treatise entitled *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* which is considered the most important contribution of Calvin to the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. From a small booklet, Calvin edited it many times until its final edition in 1559 consisted of four books and eighty chapters.

Calvin drew up the doctrines of grace in his 5-points of Calvinism known by its mnemonic acronym TULIP, summed up as follows:

**1. Total Depravity** – All men are born in a fallen condition, destitute of spiritual life as a result of the fall of the first Adam. Therefore, every human being at birth is dead in sin, without the will to do what is good, and without the power to repent and believe. Man, because of his fallen condition and left to his own choice, will

never choose God (Genesis 6:5; Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10, 23).

**2. Unconditional Election** – This refers to the sovereign, free, eternal, unmerited and unalterable choice on the part of God in choosing persons to everlasting life and salvation (Ephesians 1:4-5; 11).

**3. Limited Atonement** – This doctrine teaches that Christ's atoning work is sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect. Although the offer of the Gospel of salvation is to be preached to all, the atonement that Christ achieved is efficient only for the elect (John 3:16, 36).

**4. Irresistible Grace** – It points to the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing a person to salvation which cannot be resisted by the elect. The outward call in Gospel preaching alone may be refused, rejected, put away, neglected and disobeyed. But when the outward call of the Gospel is combined with the inward, effectual call of the Spirit of God, it is holy (2 Timothy 1:9), potent (Romans 1:16), attracting (John 12:32), life-giving (John 5:25; Ephesians 2:5), effectual (John 6:44) and irresistible (John 6:37).

**5. Preservation of the Saints** – All those who are chosen to salvation by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, and quickened by God the Holy Spirit, will receive grace so to endure to the end as that they must infallibly be saved. This doctrine stamps the seal of security to God's work of salvation (John 6:39; 10:28-29; Romans 8:38-39; Jude 24).

At the close of his life, Calvin was last seen preaching on February 6, 1564, spitting blood. He died a few months later in the evening of May 27, 1564, aged exactly 54 years 10 months and 17 days. Calvin gave his



life for the cause of the Reformation, which he believed to be worthy of any and all sacrifice. His last words were: "The sufferings

of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be..."

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# The Bible and the Reformation

## Introduction

In the year 1526, English reformer William Tyndale published his first edition of the English New Testament in Worms, Germany. These books were then smuggled into England where the people of God were able to read them in their own language. Tyndale also went on to translate much of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew into English. As the knowledge of the Word of God spread throughout England, it fuelled and sustained the Protestant Reformation movement. Thus, the printing of the English Bible was instrumental to the cause of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation in England.

Tyndale was largely responsible for our King James Bible. Earlier on, John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English but it was based on the Latin Vulgate. For Tyndale, he translated the Bible into English from the original Greek language. Hence, he was widely known as the “Father of the English Bible” and the architect of the English Reformation. The Tyndale Bible became the precursor to the 1611 King James Bible, which is widely being used by the English-speaking world to this day.

## Tyndale’s passion

William Tyndale received his education in Oxford, where he graduated with a Bachelor and Master of Arts in 1512 and 1515 respectively. Shortly after his graduation, he was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic church. He then went to Cambridge for

further studies as he had the desire to read the Scriptures in its original languages.

In Cambridge, after getting acquainted with the Greek Scriptures, he became aware of the many differences between the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church and the Word of God. Meanwhile, the Reformation started by Martin Luther in Germany was spreading its influence across the English Channel into England and her universities.

Cambridge and Tyndale were likewise influenced. The biblical doctrines of justification by faith, universal priesthood of believers, and the authority and sufficiency of Scripture among others must have been a talking point then. These teachings, together with Tyndale's own findings of the many inconsistencies of the Catholicism, influenced him so much that he was converted from Romanism to Lutheranism.

In Little Sudbury, Tyndale taught the biblical doctrine of salvation to the people but this often resulted in conflicts, especially with his fellow clergymen. One evening, a debate arose and Tyndale was told that the people were better off without the Bible in English and that “we had better be without God’s law than the pope’s”. Tyndale was dismayed and disturbed by that comment. He was unable to swallow such a blasphemous statement. His famous reply was, “I defy the pope and all his laws [against the Bible in the vernacular]. If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow to know

more of the Scripture than thou dost,” and he added, “than the pope does!”

### Tyndale's contribution

Tyndale's unpleasant encounter with that haughty clergyman led to his determination to make the Scriptures available in the vernacular. He believed that the knowledge of God's Word should not be the privilege of the clergy alone but that every man in the church should know the Word himself. This desire marked the beginning of his contribution to the English Bible. Tyndale then set off for London to obtain permission from the authorities in the church to translate the Scriptures into English. However, Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall in London refused Tyndale permission.

Tunstall's opinion was that the church was immature to receive God's Word directly and English was a language too debased for the Holy Scriptures to be translated into. As he could not get the needed permission to work on the Scriptures, Tyndale became convinced that the work of translation could not be done in London.

By the providence of God, Tyndale met a gentleman by the name of Humphrey Monmouth during his stay in London. This man was a merchant who had business interests in the Low Countries. He proposed that Tyndale do his work of translation abroad and offered to support it.

Therefore, Tyndale left England with the intention of printing the English Bible and never returned. He went to Germany, and began the tedious work of translation. After labouring for nearly a year, he completed the translation of the New Testament. He secretly sent the manuscripts for printing in Cologne but was soon discovered by

the enemies of the Reformation, and thereafter, a raid was organized. However, Tyndale was forewarned, and thus managed to escape with the printed pages and manuscripts to a place called Worms. From there, Tyndale printed the first edition of his English New Testament.

Since then, printed copies of the English New Testament were smuggled into England with the help of Humphrey Monmouth. They hid copies of the New Testament in cloth bales and food boxes and sent them into the ports of England. At that time, anyone caught in possession of a copy faced the death of a heretic. No less than six thousand copies of Tyndale's New Testament entered England, but many of these copies were either confiscated or bought up by the church only to be burned by the Roman authorities upon the orders of Bishop Tunstall. Soon, Tyndale would be condemned a heretic by Cardinal Wolsey.

But this condemnation did not bother Tyndale nor stop him from working; the ink from his pen continued to flow. He went on to translate the books of Moses and completed them. He also wrote not a few treatises in defence of the Christian faith. One such treatise, “The Practyse of Prelates”, opposed King Henry VIII's intention to divorce his wife as it is unscriptural. This incurred the King's wrath and brought forth Tyndale's death warrant.

William Tyndale was later betrayed by a man named Henry Philips. He was seized in Antwerp and taken captive to the Castle of Vilvorde near Brussels where he was imprisoned for the next eighteen months. Finally, he was charged with heresy. He was condemned, defrocked and excommunicated by the Roman Catholic church. In October 1536, he was

executed publicly in the prison yard of Castle Vilvorde. He was tied to a stake, strangled to death with an iron chain and his body was burned. But before he died, he uttered this prayer, “O Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.”

### The 1611 King James Bible

Tyndale’s prayer was answered within a few years of his death. King Henry VIII allowed the printing of the first legal English Bible, and even funded its cost! He wanted every parish in the land to have its own copy of the English Bible. The King’s command led to the birth of the Great Bible.

The Great Bible was published in 1539. It was prepared by Myles Coverdale, working under the commission of Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury at the bequest of King Henry VIII. This Bible derived its name from its size – a good fourteen inches tall, and chained to the pulpit. It became the official Bible of the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church, and was distributed to every church in England with authorization for public use.

There were two predecessors to the Great Bible. One was the Coverdale Bible published in 1535. It was the first complete Bible printed in the English language. Myles Coverdale, a disciple of Tyndale, completed the translations of the Old Testament where Tyndale left off. He used Martin Luther’s German text and the Latin Vulgate as his sources.

The other predecessor was the Thomas Matthew Bible published in 1537. It was more commonly known as Matthew-Tyndale Bible, and was the first complete Bible in the English

language to be translated from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. John Rogers, another disciple of Tyndale, used the pseudonym Thomas Matthew to print this Bible. He used Tyndale’s translations, Coverdale’s and his own, using the original text as his sources.

After the Great Bible was put in place in 1539 and used as the official Bible in the Church of England, there arose persecutions during the reign of queen “Bloody Mary”. Many reformers were forced to flee the country. Most of those who fled went to Geneva in Switzerland. There, a need for a common Bible arose. This led to the birth of the Geneva Bible.

The Geneva Bible was published in 1560. The New Testament was completed three years earlier and it retained over ninety percent of Tyndale’s original English translation. This Bible was accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references. It was also the first Bible to have numbered verses added to it, and was considered to be the first English “Study Bible”.

The Bishop’s Bible was published in 1568. It was a revision of the Great Bible but because of the Geneva Bible, it never gained popularity among the people. It was later referred to as the “rough draft of the King James Bible”.

Finally in the year 1604, when Prince James VI of Scotland became King James I of England, the reformers approached him for permission to produce a new translation of the English Bible. More than fifty eminent scholars from Cambridge, Oxford and Westminster came together to translate the original language texts. They also took into consideration Tyndale’s New Testament translation, the Coverdale

## The 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Protestant Reformation

Bible, the Matthew-Tyndale Bible, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible and the Bishop's Bible for the production of a new English Bible. In the next two years, these scholars engaged in private research and assembled their work in the next two. The year after, these works went to the press and in 1611, the King James Bible was born.

### Our heritage from the Reformation

The King James Bible that we have today is still much the same as Tyndale had translated it. Tyndale's Bible brought light to many people in the land of England and beyond. As the message of the Bible was made known to the people, they came to know the truth; countless hearts were turned to the truth and set free from the bondage of the false Christianity of Rome.

The 16th-century Protestant Reformation has left behind a rich heritage for us. From it, we receive the faithful preaching of

the Word of God because the reformers risked their lives to make it understood by the people of God. We receive the biblical doctrines of salvation, true worship of God, biblical church polity and practical piety. We also receive the Word of God in the vernacular language. All these were not freely available during the pre-Reformation era.

Almost ninety percent of Tyndale's work is retained in the King James Bible. This Bible which we have today is stained with the blood and sweat of this man. Let us, therefore, read our Bible with thanksgiving to God for Tyndale and the godly translators of the King James Bible whom the Lord Jesus Christ has raised up for the sake of His Word in the English-speaking community of saints.



**Kelvin Lim**

*I perceived how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.*

**William Tyndale**

# Preaching and the Reformation

The Reformation of the 16th century, led by men like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin initially revolved around the three centres of Wittenberg, Zurich and Geneva. During the years prior to the Reformation, papal authority, ritualism and impersonal relics had replaced the preaching of the Word of God. Many of the established clergy did not preach at all. If there was preaching, it was usually a simple homily weaving in the sayings of the church fathers and folk stories. Often these were in Latin, which most of the people could not even understand. John Calvin wrote of the preaching before the Reformation,

What sermons in Europe then exhibited that simplicity with which Paul wishes Christian people to be always occupied? ... For, as sermons were then usually divided, the first half was devoted to those misty questions of the schools which might astonish the rude populace, while the second contained sweet stories, or not unamusing speculations, by which the hearers might be kept on the alert. Only a few expressions were thrown in from the Word of God, that by their majesty they might procure credit for these frivolities.

By contrast, preaching was central to the ministry of our Lord in so much that He could leave those seeking Him for physical relief by saying, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (Mark 1:38). The

apostles planted and established churches through preaching. This record alone is its best defence. As he believed and had proven that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21), the Apostle Paul urged his young protégé Timothy to simply "preach the Word". This was not preaching for preaching's sake, but biblically-saturated messages, for "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). It must have a definite focus as "we preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

The Reformation returned to the apostolic pattern with a revival of biblical Christ-centred preaching from the pulpits in the common vernacular. It swept across much of Europe by anointed preaching coupled with the printed word, especially the Bible. R.L. Dabney wrote, "All the leading reformers, whether in Germany, Switzerland, England or Scotland were constant preachers, and their sermons were prevalently expository." He went on to say, "We can assume with safety that the instrumentality to which the spiritual power of the great revolution of the Reformation - was mainly due to the restoration of scriptural preaching."

No longer would ritualistic sacraments be seen as the primary means of edifying the saints and saving sinners. To illustrate this, the pulpit was raised and placed in the centre of Protestant churches. The communion table was also placed underneath to show



the subordination of the sacraments to the preaching of the Word.

### Martin Luther

Luther (1483-1546) began this radical shift from the Roman church by turning the church back to establishing preaching as the central act of worship. This return to the primacy of preaching was simply a return to the days of the early church. Martin Luther in 1533 explained, "The Word of God is the greatest, most necessary, most important thing in Christendom."

Between 1510 and 1546, Luther preached more than 3,000 sermons. He emphasized the need to go back to the original languages and do exegesis, and he also produced commentaries on Romans, Galatians and the Epistles of Peter.

### Ulrich Zwingli

Zwingli (1484-1531) shared Luther's conviction and demonstrated it by a life committed to preaching. On New Year's Day in 1519, on his thirty-fifth birthday, Zwingli went into the Zurich cathedral pulpit before a great crowd and declared, "It is to Christ that I desire to lead you, to Christ the true source of salvation. His divine Word is the only food that I wish to set before your souls." On every Sabbath day, Zwingli expounded the *Textus Receptus* Greek New Testament in a systematic manner beginning with the Gospel of Matthew.

It was said that more than two thousand people were soon "hungering for the strong meat of the Scriptures". This light soon proved victorious that by 1520, the town council issued a decree to all parish priests, curates and exhorters, in town and country,

"that they should freely and everywhere preach the holy gospels and the apostolic epistles, and all speak the same language as the Spirit of God should direct them, and only teach what they could prove by the word of God. As for the doctrines and commandments that were of man's institution, they should let them alone".

### John Calvin

Calvin (1509-1564) led the main work in Geneva. He took Biblical exegesis to new heights with his systematic preaching and commentaries. Calvin never wavered from expository preaching for almost 25 years in Geneva. He preached ten sermons every two weeks. Calvin immensely disliked speculation by theologians and preachers beyond the text of Scripture. He sought nothing more than a return to biblical and apostolic teaching and practice. Calvin's careful and precise approach spawned a whole system of theology named after him. He was known for his expository sermons and he preached through almost the entire Bible by careful exegesis.

These sermons became the basis for his famous commentary set. Calvin would have an enormous literary output and his works would total some 55 volumes of commentaries, lectures, tracts, treatises, sermons and letters. He wrote exegetical commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. Calvin made clear his belief by arguing that the church "cannot be built up, that is to say, it cannot be brought to soundness, or continue in a good state, except by means of the preaching of the Word".

### Training of preachers

The example and teaching of these three reformers affected others, both



directly and indirectly, through centres for the training of ministers. They taught men to “give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:13). Luther and Melancthon at Wittenberg, Zwingli in Zurich, as well as Calvin at Geneva and the numerous centres of training set up in the Netherlands, Scotland and later North America.

Under the direct or indirect inspiration of Geneva, ministerial training was given a firm basis in the exegesis of Scripture in the original languages. The Geneva Academy founded in 1559 drew students from all over Europe and by the time of Calvin’s death in 1564, there were 1,200 students. At Zurich, both practising ministers and divinity students met five days a week to share in the systematic exposition of Scripture.

John Knox is a good example. He returned to Scotland in 1559 from seminary in Geneva after fleeing to the continent when the queen Bloody Mary was on the throne. His powerful preaching then became an important factor in swaying the nation to Protestantism. It was said by some who heard him, “Others snipped at the branches of popery; but he strikes at the roots, to destroy the whole.”

In England, the public preaching of the Gospel by men like Hugh Latimer, Hooper, Bradford and others was attended with remarkable success. Great open-air preaching took place with thousands attending. Speaking of the preaching of Hugh Latimer, Becon, who was Cranmer’s chaplain, testified, “None, except the stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart, went away from it without being affected with high detestation of sin, and moved unto all godliness and virtue.”

## **21<sup>st</sup>-century Reformation preaching**

We need to heed the teaching of Scripture and the lessons of history. Preaching is simply manifesting the glory of God through the exposition of Scripture. It is God’s primary ordained means of building up the saints and reaching the lost (Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 10:14-15). There is no substitute for preaching. Titus 1:3 says that God “manifested his word through preaching”. The Apostle Paul knew: “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17) and was so constrained by this thought that he declared, “for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

The reformers were convinced from Scripture that Spirit-filled and prayerful “preaching of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18) was the power of reformation. They only had a Bible and prayer but they discovered that these were all they needed. Luther put it well,

I have opposed the indulgences and all the papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing... the Word did it all... For it is almighty and takes captive the hearts, and if the hearts are captured the evil work will fall of itself.

This emphasis is being diluted or destroyed in many churches today. Ritualism, counselling, seminars, musical specials, choirs and even dramas have replaced Biblical preaching of Scripture. If there is any preaching today, it is mainly shallow, which does not lift up the majesty and glory of God. The undermining of the authority of God’s Word by the insidious encroachments of higher criticism and

textual criticism has catalysed this decline. It is somewhat ironic that the church of Rome taught either through ritualism or drama teams travelling around performing mystery plays and passion plays. We see the same methodology being promoted today by ritualism and entertainment in many churches.

Today, the Bible, if utilized, is simply moulded by many professing Christians to fit their own values. The objective Scripture is being used to say almost anything we want it to say. It has been denied, twisted and reduced to a treasury of platitudes, which has produced flexible and shapeless Christians, which the gates of hell have little difficulty in overcoming. In sharp contrast to our post-modern relativistic age, the Word of God remains unchanged and eternally unchangeable.

Pastors must believe they have a divine responsibility as ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Their hearts must be moved by the objective truths of God's Word. They must believe what

Jesus said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." God's Words are infinitely more powerful than ours, so a preacher's job is to ensure the safe transmission of His. Messages must come not "... in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Then preachers will see why Lloyd Jones summed up preaching as "logic on fire".

Preachers must be filled with the Spirit of God as they live out circumspectly and carefully the message they preach so that it is not mere head knowledge. God does not anoint methods but holy men to preach the Word. Robert Murray McCheyne rightly observed, "A holy minister is a powerful weapon in the hands of God."

What a difference it would make to our churches, our families and our lives if every true preacher really believed this.



**Paul Ferguson**

*Rise up, O men of God!  
Have done with lesser things.  
Give heart and mind and soul and strength  
To serve the King of kings.*

*Rise up, O men of God!  
The church for you doth wait,  
Her strength unequal to her task;  
Rise up, and make her great!*

**William P. Merrill, 1867-1954**

# BIBLE TRIVIA - GENESIS 50

Sarah Yong

**READ THE PASSAGE THEN CIRCLE ONE OPTION TO COMPLETE EACH SENTENCE.**

E.g. Joseph wept when his (J) brother (N) father (U) mother died.

1. The Egyptians mourned for Israel (C) forty (E) seventy (U) ten days.
2. Joseph asked Pharaoh for permission to bury his father in (F) Canaan (M) Egypt (T) Goshen.
3. When they came to Atad, they mourned with a great lamentation for (A) three (D) five (G) seven days.
4. So Israel was buried in the cave of the field of (I) Machpelah (P) Ephron (W) Mamre.
5. The brothers sent a messenger unto Joseph, to plead with him to (H) bless (O) forgive (Y) prosper them.
6. Joseph told them not to fear, for God's special providence had enabled him to save the lives of many (B) cattle (K) servants (R) people.
7. He lived a hundred and ten years and saw (P) two (V) four (Z) six generations of descendants.

## DECODE THE MESSAGE!

USING THE CIRCLED ANSWERS ABOVE, FILL IN THE BRACKETED LETTERS ON THE BLANKS BELOW. (HINT: THE NUMBER BELOW EACH BLANK CORRESPONDS TO EACH QUESTION NUMBER)

\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ Y \_ \_ H \_ S B \_ \_ TH \_ \_  
 2 5 6 3 4 7 1 1 7 1 6 5 1 4 6 5 1 6  
 TH \_ \_ \_ T \_ \_ SPASS \_ S  
 1 4 6 6 1 1

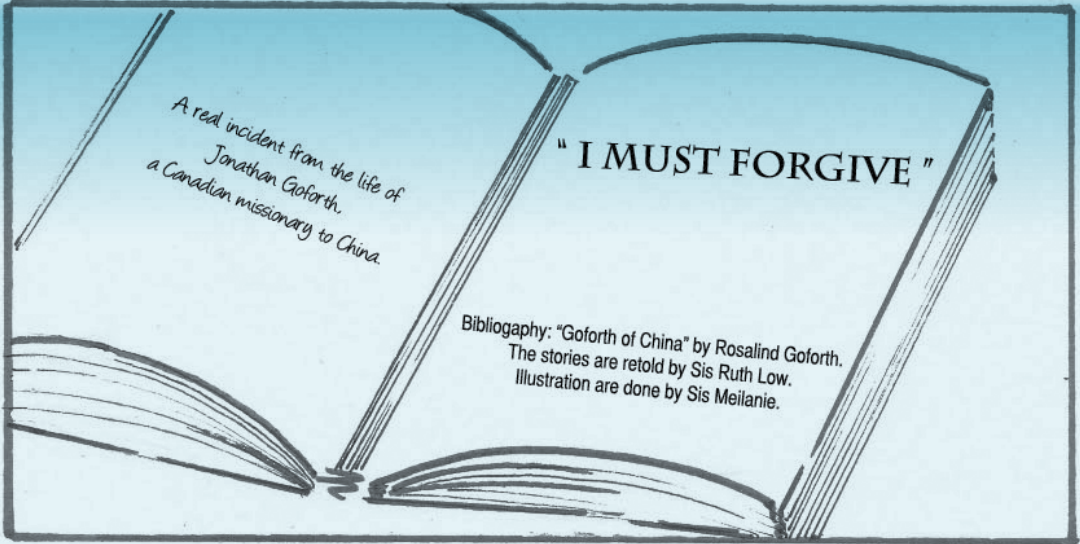
When Jesus was on earth, He taught His disciples many things. You can read a parable illustrating the message above in Matthew 18:21-35.

### Answers to Vol. 10, Issue 4 - Bible Trivia - Genesis 49

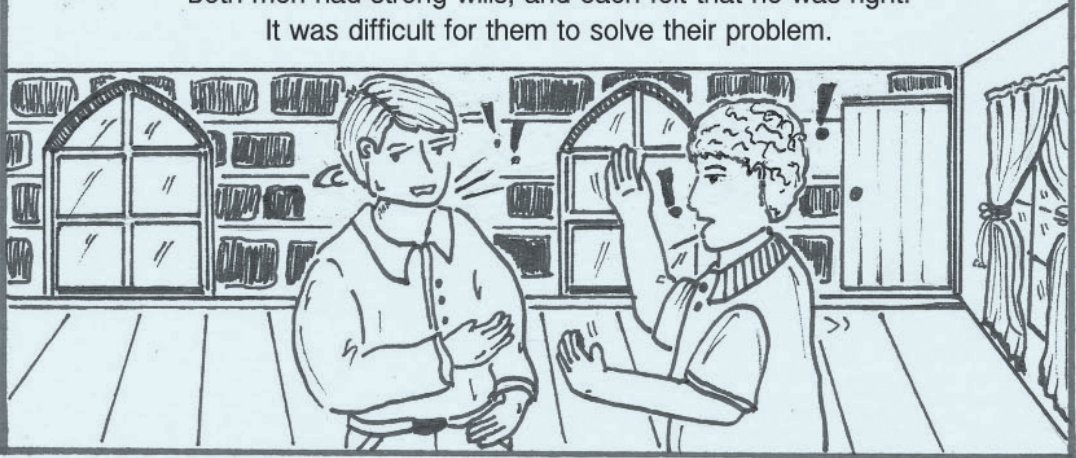
p. 27 - Reuben (v. 4), Simeon and Levi (v. 5), Judah (v. 8), Zebulun (v. 13), Issachar (v. 14), Dan (v. 16), Gad (v. 19), Asher (v. 20), Naphtali (v. 21), Joseph (v. 22), Benjamin (v. 27).

Jacob commanded his sons to bury him in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan.





Once, Mr Goforth had an argument with someone he worked with. Both men had strong wills, and each felt that he was right. It was difficult for them to solve their problem.



Other missionaries persuaded them to meet alone and so they did.

On their knees, the matter seemed to be settled peaceably. However, in Mr Goforth's heart, there was still some unhappiness. He had not fully forgiven the other man.



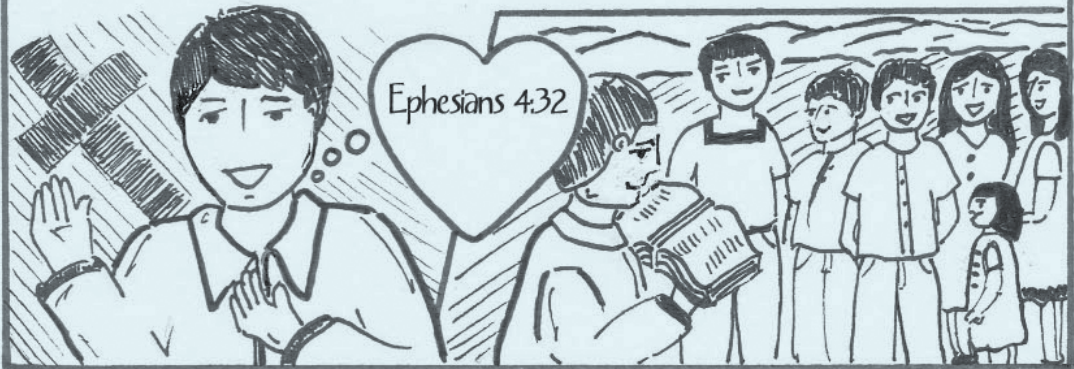


Then on the day before the start of a long tour of the mission stations, Mr Goforth became convicted of his hypocrisy. People might not have known but he knew that in his heart, he was sinning.

So he took sometime to humble himself before God and ask for His forgiveness.



By God's grace, all unchristian feelings towards the other man disappeared, and love reigned in his heart. It was a wonderful change and definitely a great burden had been lifted from him. Mr Goforth then went on the long tour and God was pleased to use him mightily.



Children, have you refused to forgive someone who has done you wrong? Jesus forgives your sins when you believe in Him; will you not then forgive others? *Ephesians 4:32* tells us: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."



Let us learn to forgive, for when we forsake sin such as an unforgiving spirit, God will be happy to bless and use us just as He did to Mr Goforth.



# 2<sup>nd</sup> Bible Witness Retreat

## Photos & Testimonies



Praise the Lord for a most blessed time of worship, study of God's Word and fellowship during the Bible Witness (BW) Retreat on "Knowing God" from 8-10 September 2010 in Batam....

It was with great excitement as I embark for Batam. I could not wait to study God's Word intensively. I sincerely hoped the Lord would teach me much and draw me closer to Him during the retreat. School life had somehow taken a toll on my spiritual fervour for God and I needed the Lord to refresh me.

As always, the Lord is good. The messages preached by Rev Koshy were both Spirit-filled and instructive. The praising of God through the singing of the good-old hymns was uplifting and delightful. The fellowship was exceptionally sweet.

The lessons learnt from the BW retreat still ring warmly in my heart, especially from the first message on "Who art Thou, O Lord?". Even till today, I still pray to the Lord and asked Him the two questions asked by the Apostle Paul, "Who art Thou, Lord?" and "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

The Lord has also rekindled my zeal to study His Word even more, considering the fact that "His greatness is unsearchable". My wife and I have been so blessed that we are re-visiting the entire retreat notes during our family devotions.

*Herbert Goh*

We thank God for a blessed time at the retreat. With a child in tow, we were never under the illusion of having a 'peaceful' retreat. Nonetheless, the blessings of our Lord were that of a renewal of our spirits, the refreshment of our souls and a respite from worldly toil and labour through the ministry of God's Word ... even amidst the sometimes incessant wailings of our young son.

In addition, we're thankful to God for the comfortable accommodation, and the warm and hospitable fellowship we've enjoyed in this short retreat.

All praise and glory to God for who He is and for all His benefits towards our family.

Lastly, as recipients of the edifying ministry of Bible Witness through her magazine (and retreat!), we hope and pray that she'll remain steadfast, unmoveable and always abounding in the work of the Lord, to the blessing of other souls as well.

In His grace,

*Dr Adrian & Eileen Poh*

