

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Twenty

Overcoming During a Time of Abnormality

Part One on the Life of John Huss

Knowing the Times

As we consider those who have gone before us, it is helpful to know about the time period in which they lived. Looking at the life of John Huss, another of the pre-Reformation heralds, it is worthwhile to consider the age and environment in which he lived.

Watchman Nee helps us to see the prophecies concerning the various ages of the church in his book *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, a study of chapters two and three of Revelation.

In this portion of the word, the apostle John was looking ahead to what was to come in the various stages of church history. Today, we have the advantage of looking back to observe what has been fulfilled over time. In all of the seven churches the Lord calls for overcomers. Watchman Nee points out that overcomers are normal, ordinary believers living and serving at times of abnormality. This was surely the case of the reformer we are now considering – John Huss.

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A Good Foundation

The church in Pergamos began around the time of Constantine (the 4th century) when the church and the world were joined together. Pergamos means union or marriage. We know that friendship with the world is enmity with the Father (James 4:4). When the church and the world were united, the church became fallen and was no longer a chaste bride for Christ. As a result of the church joining the world, it eventually grew into an abnormally big tree as described in Matthew 13.

The Church in Pergamos eventually

becomes the church in Thyatira, the church in apostasy. As we saw when we looked at the life of John Wycliffe, the church during the middle ages was a not only joined with the world, it was also filled with idolatry and spiritual fornication. The church developed into a large hierarchal organization fully involved with the state and with politics. She also became filled with idolatry and propagated many heretical doctrines. All this was the result of leaving her first love and forsaking the teaching of the apostles. Witness Lee talks about the church during this time: “In the history of Christianity from the sixth century to the sixteenth century, a total of ten centuries, the Roman Catholic Church locked up the Bible, causing the church to fall into the Dark Ages, an age without God's word, revelation, and light (*Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery*).”

During the Middle Ages serious errors abounded regarding even the most basic truths concerning baptism and salvation. Satan turned people from a proper relationship with Christ the Head to idols. Then he annulled the proper functioning of the members of the Body by bringing in the clergy-laity system through the teachings of the Nicolaitans. It was into this environment that John Huss was born.

Lee says, “In the fifteenth century there were some people in the church who rose up to recover and to correct the situation. We all know that reformation of the church began formally with Martin Luther. The Reformation was brought in through Martin Luther. However, before Martin Luther, there were some who were quite enlightened and who rose up to speak for God in protest to degraded Christianity. Two of the most powerful ones were John Wycliffe on the British Isles and John Huss on the Continent. Both of them were very strong,

and the light they received from the Bible was also quite clear. Before the time of Luther, they rose up and told people that the Roman Catholic Church was an apostate church, that she had left the revelation of God, and that her actions were completely against God; under her, they said, the church had become completely degraded. They gave numerous illustrations and released much light, and their words were received by many people. In their time, they laid a very good foundation for the Reformation (*Testimony and the Ground of the Church*).



God's Sovereignty

In our consideration of John Huss, we cannot help but be impressed with God's sovereignty over all things. He is truly the divine arranger working invisibly behind the scenes. We have seen that the Lord raised up John Wycliffe to be a beacon of light in England in the 12th century. So how did Wycliffe's influence come to extend over Bohemia, the land of John Huss, in the 14th century? This happened by the ruling of the all-sovereign God who brought together England and Bohemia through a marriage. It was a remarkably providential matter that England would be united with this almost unknown country of Bohemia. King Richard II of England married Anne of Bohemia, the daughter of the emperor of Germany. Thus a communication was opened between these two distant countries. It just so happened that Anne of Bohemia, who became known as Good Queen Anne, was in the habit of reading the New Testament before she went to England. Queen Anne appreciated, defended and propagated Wickliffe's teachings in her adopted country of England and also helped introduce and spread them into her native country of Bohemia. Queen Anne was the one who opened the door for students from Bohemia to come to Oxford to study. This was significant in that some of

these students, while at Oxford, picked up the teachings of Wycliffe. As the door was closing for the furtherance of Wycliffe's views in England, these students carried Wycliffe's teachings back to their home country of Bohemia. This was all under the sovereign hand of God, who later used these students and Wycliffe's teachings to influence Huss. Good Queen Anne eventually was considered as one of the mothers of the Reformation.



The church in Bohemia came into being through the missionary labors of brothers back in the eighth through tenth centuries. Peter Waldo and the Waldenses of the 12th century found refuge from persecution in Bohemia and by their testimony and teaching shaped the Lord's expression in that land and prepared a way for what was to come with Huss and others in the 15th century.

Huss – the Goose

Huss was born in 1369 of peasant parents in Husinec, which today is in the south of the Czech Republic. Husinec apparently meant "Goosetown." When John was in his twenties, he shortened his name to Huss or "goose." Actually, in his Czech language, Huss rhymes with goose, and this name became the object of puns among his friends and others. This continued even to the time of Luther. Although for years this "goose" was hard to catch, eventually according to Luther it was "cooked" for defying the pope.

John Huss was one of notable character, who lived in simplicity and purity. His father died when he was but a schoolboy. A nobleman from the village took up the burden for John and provided for his early education. John was initially educated in a village school by the monks. From a young age he had a quest for learning and a desire to go to Prague to continue his education. He told his

widowed mother that “God will care for us there.” Although a “charity” student, he did not like to receive assistance from the university for nothing. He therefore rendered service to a professor for his food and clothing. He studied at the University of Prague, which was established in recent times by the emperor, Charles IV. It was during his university years as a student that Huss became acquainted with some of the works of Wickliffe. His favorite reading, however, was the history of the martyrs.

During these years, Huss looked with distrust and disdain on the lives of the monks and others within the Catholic Church. It was also during these years that the famous forty years' schism of the popes was occurring. Two men, one in France and one in Rome, were both claiming to be the true pope. Many at this time were unsettled by the rivalry of these two. Both men claimed to be infallible, and each called the other names such as Belial and Antichrist. Terrible sins were taking place. The practice of simony, the selling of official positions in the church, became common. Indulgences were sold that promised pardon in advance for sins of the worst kind. As in Wycliffe's days, the indulgence peddlers would assure buyers of eternal happiness in order to gather immense sums of money for themselves and the popes. What a corrupt environment Huss lived in!

Huss worked his way through the university where he earned a bachelor's, masters, and then finally a doctorate. His intellectual gifts did not go unnoticed and he eventually became a dean and then the rector of the university. Along the way he was trained and ordained for the priesthood. He said, “I had thought to become a priest quickly in order to secure a good livelihood and dress and to be held in esteem by men.” But it was his service as a preacher at Prague's Bethlehem Chapel that he became well known. This chapel was built “for the preaching of the word of God in the language of the people.’

Discovering the Bible

Although Huss was influenced by the corrupted religious world about him, he was

unlike many of his colleagues. His search for truth led him to the Bible. It was in the Bible that profound truths began to be unveiled to him which traditions and customs had previously covered. He testified, “When the Lord gave me knowledge of Scriptures, I discharged that kind of stupidity from my foolish mind.” The Bible truths he was discovering became his standard and norm in all his preaching. Huss was learning to trust the scriptures and was inspired

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by Wycliffe's writings to do so all the more. He spoke of “desiring to hold, believe, and assert whatever is contained in them [the scriptures] as long as I have breath in me.”

Huss, along with other Czechs at the university, took heed to Wycliffe's ideas of reform. They began to emphasize the Bible more than the pronouncements of the pope. They also took issue with the depraved morals of the clergy. This created more problems at the University of Prague between the Czechs and Germans. In the midst of the politics, the Germans began to label Wycliffe's teachings as heretical and his followers as heretics. Huss was increasingly criticized, was forbidden to preach and was eventually excommunicated. However, the local Bohemians still backed him, and he continued to minister at Bethlehem Chapel. Thank the Lord for this faithful steward in God's house.

Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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