

86. THE REFORMATION IN SCOTLAND

Before we continue studying the history of God's Church in England, we must learn more about the Reformation in Scotland. Scotland and England now form one kingdom under James I. Before that, England and Scotland were two separate kingdoms.



*Henry VIII, King of England.
(1491-1547)*



James V, king of Scotland



*Mary de Guise
1515-1560*

The previous chapter explained that Henry VIII reigned over England from 1509 to 1547. At the same time, James V reigned over Scotland. In England, Henry VIII broke with the church of Rome, but James V was a zealous Roman Catholic who opposed both the Reformation *and* the Anglican Church in England. The wife of James V was just as fiercely Roman Catholic as her husband. Her name was Mary de Guise. She was a sister of Charles and Francis de Guise from France, of whom we told you a lot when we discussed the history of the Huguenots in France. Yet the Reformation also penetrated Scotland. The struggle was difficult and severe, but eventually, the Reformation was victorious in Scotland.

In England, the struggle began at the palace. There the king wanted to go his own way and refused to obey the pope when he did not allow King Henry VIII to divorce and re-marry.

In Scotland, it was primarily the *people* who carried on the struggle.

In England, the king compelled the people to **disobey** the pope. If someone still obeyed the pope, that person would be persecuted.

In Scotland, the king compelled his subjects to *obey* the pope, and anyone who disobeyed was persecuted and killed.

The blood of the martyrs has also flowed in Scotland.

Scotland was a poor country, but the Roman Catholic Church was wealthy. Many properties belonged to the church or the monasteries. If a nation was ever oppressed by Roman Catholic rule, it certainly was Scotland.

We said the Reformation had also penetrated Scotland. In 1525 Scotland received a Bible printed in the Scottish language. That was a great blessing to the Scots because there was much ignorance among them. But now they could read the Word of God! John Wycliffe's followers also came to Scotland, but the Roman Catholic Church immediately began persecuting them.

HAMILTON

The name of the first martyr put to death in Scotland was Hamilton. He belonged to the highest nobility. He enjoyed studying, and his father approved and allowed that. First, he studied in Paris for some years. After that, he attended the University at Wittenberg. He learned to know Luther and Melancthon there, and God blessed the instruction he received. Luther and Melancthon opened his eyes to the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. When he returned to Scotland, he wrote several booklets defending the Reformation.

In those days, the town of St. Andrew was close to Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. A Roman Catholic archbishop lived there. That archbishop had Hamilton arrested, and in 1528 he was



*Patrick Hamilton
(1504-1528)
Wikipedia*



burned at the stake. That young nobleman suffered terribly. His torturers used wet wood that wouldn't burn. It took six hours before that smoking, smouldering wood finally caught fire, and Hamilton entered eternal glory. What needless cruelty!

Hamilton was the first of *many* martyrs in Scotland. The archbishop of St. Andrew wanted to destroy the Reformation in Scotland. Thankfully, he was not successful. On the contrary! The heroism with which the martyrs entered death caused the Reformation to grow and spread! Again we see that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.

The Scottish king, James V, died in 1542. He had only one little daughter, Mary Stuart. When her father died, she was only one week old. Naturally, that baby could not be queen! So her mother, Mary de Guise, became regent for the time being. While she reigned, she persecuted and murdered many Christians in Scotland. Though she caused stakes to smoke all over the country, she could not prevent the Reformation from spreading because it was God's purpose to establish His Church in Scotland too! Nobody can thwart God's decrees.

GEORGE WISHART

A fleet of warships lies close to the town of St. Andrew. The cannons on those warships boom constantly. Slowly the black gunpowder smoke floats away. The heavy iron cannonballs smash their way through the town, causing widespread destruction. There are dead and wounded. St. Andrew is under siege. The warships lying near the coast busily bombarding St. Andrew are French.

What?

Has war broken out between Scotland and France?!

No, not at all. The regent, Mary de Guise, enlisted the aid of the French fleet. She is a sister of the powerful de Guises in France. Her brothers sent that fleet to assist their sister in Scotland.

Assist her?

Against whom?

Well, that is quite a story.

As mentioned, Mary de Guise was the widow of the deceased king, James V. She was Mary Stuart's mother and ruled Scotland till her baby daughter was old enough to rule. The persecution raged severely. The archbishop of St. Andrew had stakes erected everywhere to burn the 'heretics'.

In 1546 a well-loved minister was preaching in Scotland. His name was George Wishart. This man had studied in Switzerland. He came into contact with some Protestants there who completely convinced him that the Reformation was God's work. He could no



George Wishart
(1513-1546)
Wikipedia

longer endure being under the false doctrines of Rome. After returning to Scotland, he preached the truth from the Word of the Lord with zeal and enthusiasm. He could preach very well. When he stood in the pulpit, it was dead silent in the church. Everyone listened breathlessly to the Scriptural words of the preacher. When finally the service was over, the congregation went home, deeply impressed. People came from miles around to hear George Wishart preach. He couldn't complain about a lack

of listeners! More and more people in Scotland talked about him. His name soon became known in Roman Catholic circles.

They decided they must deal quickly and firmly with such a famous heretic!

The archbishop of St. Andrew decided to put a stop to his preaching. He had the widely known and beloved preacher arrested and immediately condemned Wishart to death. They tied him to the stake with an iron chain and lit a fire under him so he was burned.

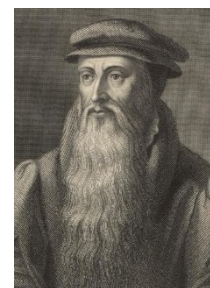
The Scottish people were highly indignant when they heard what had happened. Some nobles decided to avenge the death of Wishart with blood. Soon after, the archbishop of St. Andrew, who had ordered the murder of Wishart, was himself murdered. The regent Maria was furious when she learned of the murder of the archbishop. She called her troops to besiege the township. But St. Andrew was powerful and bravely defended by the nobles who had murdered the archbishop. If they only laid siege to that township from the land side, the great question was: would they ever be able to conquer it?

That's why Regent Maria asked her brothers in France for help. The French immediately dispatched their fleet to Scotland, now bombarding the city from the sea side. Yet the brave defenders of St. Andrew did not fear. As we wrote, the city was powerful and well-supplied with weapons and provisions.

JOHN KNOX

At that time, a man lived in the beleaguered city who would become the successor of George Wishart. He was the well-known John Knox, recorded in the history books as the Reformer of Scotland.

He was born in 1505¹, close to Edinburg. His father wanted him to study, and John was keen and enjoyed it. At first, he studied in his birthplace. Then John became a student at the University of Glasgow, a city on Scotland's west coast. He read many of the works of the church father, Augustine, and the Spirit of God used that to open his eyes and convert him.



John Knox
(1514 – 1572)
Wikipedia

When George Wishart died at the stake, John Knox became his successor. Knox was preaching in St. Andrew when the Scottish troops besieged it on the land side, and the French fleet bombarded it from the sea side. He seriously warned the inhabitants of St. Andrew not to trust in their weapons but to pray to the Lord for deliverance. When the people did not listen to this preaching, he predicted the enemy would capture St. Andrew.
That happened!



John Knox preaching before the Lords of the Congregation, in the Parish Church of St. Andrew's, Scotland, 10th June 1559
<https://www.webtruth.org/christian-history>

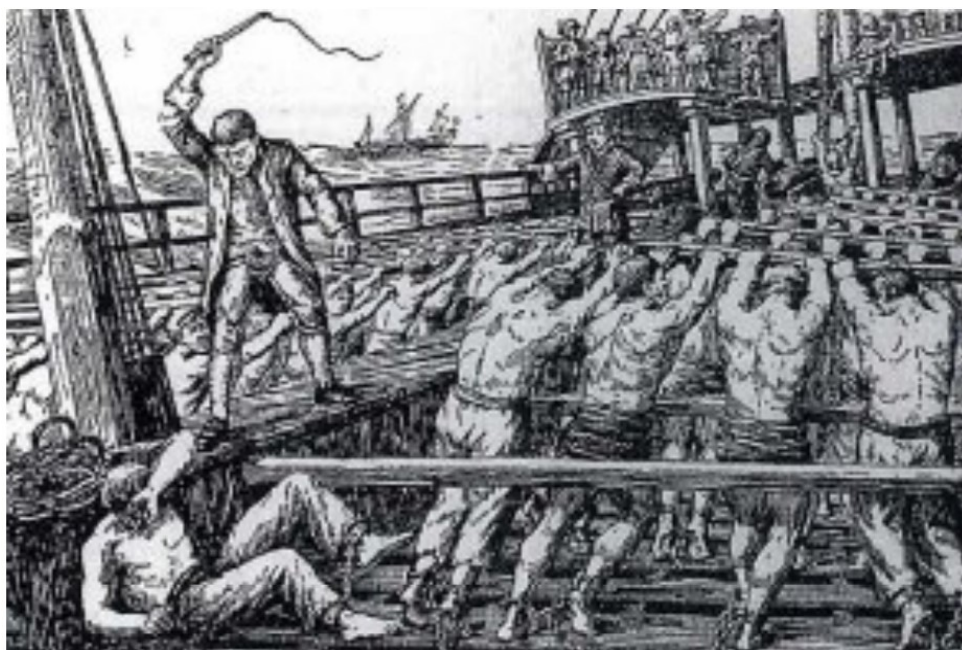
¹ Historians are not sure about his day of birth. Most recent studies suggest that to be 1514.

Eventually, they ran out of food. They suffered famine. As a result, a terrible pestilence broke out, and in 1547 the city had to surrender to the Scottish and French troops.

JOHN KNOX AS GALLEY SLAVE

A French galley moves along the coast of Scotland. Galleys are warships propelled by rowers. Hundreds of galley slaves had to row. Life was terrible for those poor people. Their master chained them to the benches with iron chains. There they rowed whenever he demanded it. There they slept at night while sitting on those hard benches. It was boiling hot in the summer, and in the winter, it was freezing cold because the cold winds blew right across that open bench space. Supervisors, armed with long whips, flogged them unmercifully. If they became sick, there were no doctors to care for them, but they had to keep rowing. You understand that those poor people usually did not last very long. Chained to those benches, they rowed till death ended their suffering. But that wasn't a problem. The supervisor threw the dead body overboard, and a new galley slave replaced the dead one. They always had plenty of galley slaves. Terrible!

The galley, which quietly moves past the Scottish coast, is rowed by hundreds of galley slaves. Let's have a look.



Galley slaves rowing the boat. <https://www.deruyter.org/>

There they sit.

There are older men with thin faces dulled by their daily misery.

There are young people with intent, grim expressions.

There are rough, indifferent characters who try to make the best of it.

Some silent people cannot join the rude mockery they sometimes hear.

They all move their oars up and down, up and down with monotonous regularity. At times the cracking lash of a whip lands on the back of one of the rowers. Perhaps that poor man is sick. Maybe high fevers sap his strength, and he cannot row as powerfully as the others. But those cruel overseers don't care about that. They must row until they die!

There are plenty of galley slaves. They do not have to be sparing with them.

Among those toiling slaves sits . . . John Knox, the preacher from St. Andrew! When that city surrendered in 1547, he was captured and condemned to the galleys. They knew he was a 'heretic'.

He suffered terribly, but God gave him the strength to endure. He had an iron-strong constitution. They often tried to get John Knox to deny his faith but never succeeded. John Knox did not keep quiet on those benches. He spoke boldly

of his faith. He often talked to the other galley slaves beside him and proclaimed the gospel to them. Did that preaching bear fruit? We don't know. One day God will reveal that too.

When the supervisors noticed John speaking about the gospel, they whipped him to silence him. They heaped mockery on him and treated him with scorn and acute hatred. Yet he persevered. He was not afraid. Once, a priest wanted to force him to

kiss a small image of Mary, the mother of the Lord. John Knox resolutely refused. The priest persisted.

He tried pressing the image to John's lips so he could say the heretic had kissed the image. Then John Knox grabbed that image from the priest's hand, tossed it overboard and said mockingly: "The virgin is light enough; let her learn to swim." And now they are rowing along the Scottish coast. Knox looks out and sees the steeple of the St. Andrew Church in the distance. He has preached there so often. Suddenly he says to the galley slave next to him: "Do you see the church of St. Andrew over there? I will preach the gospel in that church again!"

Openmouthed, his companion stares at him, then answers: "That's impossible!"

It hardly ever happened that a galley slave was freed again. Especially that obstinate heretic would never see liberty again! He would undoubtedly die on the rowing bench. That's why the other slave looked so astonished and unbelieving, even a little mockingly, at John Knox when he said that.

And yet, one day, that galley stops in a Scottish harbour. One of the supervisors approaches the bench where John Knox sits chained. The lock clicks open. With a rattle, the chains fall. He commands John to get up. Knox obeys, not understanding why. To his surprise, he gets his clothes back and must follow the overseer. When John arrives on deck, the gangplank lies ready. He is told that he may go. He walks off the galley and - is free! The heavy gangplank is taken in when he reaches the shore, and the galley moves away. What must have passed through John's mind? True, he had believed and declared that he would preach in the church of St. Andrew again, but would he never have doubted? I'm sure he did! You may be sure that he thanked God wholeheartedly!

Moving away from the harbour, he looks back and sees the galley just swinging around to sea again. That which was impossible with man has happened! But how?

Why did they free that dangerous heretic, against whom they had such a grudge, and let him go unhindered?

MARY STUART

Mary, the daughter of the deceased king, James V, was now seven years old and about to marry Francis II, the crown prince of France. What?

A child of seven years old getting married?

Well, that happened more often in those days. Mary's mother, Mary de Guise, had organised that. The Scottish and French royal houses had to be closely linked through that marriage. Francis II, the future king of France, and Mary Stuart, the future queen of Scotland, had to become husband and wife. It did not matter that they were still children as long as the government could formalise that marriage contract. Then France and Scotland would cooperate and work together in future. Their main aim was to destroy the Reformation in Scotland.



*Francis II of France.
Wikipedia*



*Mary Stuart.
Queen of the Scots. Wikipedia*

What a terrible danger for Protestantism in Scotland!

The same thing had happened in England. There Bloody Mary and Philip II married. Then England and Spain joined forces, intending to destroy the Reformation in England. We saw how that failed. Bloody Mary died childless after a brief reign, and Elizabeth succeeded her. See the previous chapter. Now, something similar is happening in Scotland. The Scottish royal house could depend on the full support of France when trying to exterminate Protestantism in Scotland.

In honour of that marriage, various Scottish prisoners of war, who were kept prisoners on the French galleys, were released. Among those

released was John Knox! That's why he was allowed to leave the galley.

God's ways are incredible!

A marriage between two ardent Roman Catholics, aiming to *destroy* the Reformation, had to cooperate to deliver Scotland's great reformer from chains and restore his liberty!

The governments could not have suspected that! For then it definitely would not have happened!

An enormous task still awaited John Knox. God did not put John's faith to shame. He would preach in the church of St. Andrew again! Whatever the devil tried to *destroy* the Church of the Lord was used by God to *increase* His Church. Do you see the golden thread of God's reign also running through this history?

That is God's amazing guidance and control.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following:
 - a. James V
 - b. Hamilton
 - c. Mary de Guise
 - d. Mary Stuart
2. How did the Reformation penetrate Scotland?
3. How did the government view the growth of the Reformation? What action did it take?
4. How did God bless the labours of George Wishart?
5. What events were triggered by the death of Wishart?
6. How did the regent react?
7. Give the early background of John Knox.
8. What warning did Knox give to the inhabitants of St. Andrews? What was the result?
9. How did Knox end up as a galley slave? Why was he released? Give both a human and a divine cause.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Why was the struggle more severe in Scotland than in England?
2. Why did the Reformation come to Scotland later than most European countries?