

58. JOHN HUSS 1369-1415 (1): A WARNING VOICE

In 1392, Prague, the capital of Bohemia, received a new church building. Bohemia is situated to the South of Germany and is now a part of



Czechoslovakia. A very wealthy citizen of Prague had donated that new church building to the city. His name was Mulhamio. When he gifted the building to Prague, he attached two conditions.

1. The clergy was only allowed to preach there in the local language, and
2. The clergy was only allowed to preach from God's Word.

That way, all who came to listen would also understand the message. That building was named: 'The Bethlehem Chapel'.

In other Roman Catholic churches, the clergy usually performed services in Latin, which the ordinary people did not understand.

In 1402 the Bethlehem Chapel received a new bishop because the previous one had died. The name of the new bishop was *John Huss*. He was still relatively young, only thirty-three years old. Prague had received a capable bishop in John Huss because he was an excellent orator. The Lord had given him that gift so that the people in the pew could easily understand the faithful preaching. Not surprisingly, the people flocked to Bethlehem Chapel when Huss ascended the pulpit.

HUSS BEGINS HIS WORK

John Huss was born in 1369 in the small town of Husinec, situated in Bohemia's South. His parents were poor. Yet John Huss began to study. We do not know how he paid for his studies. In those days, there was a famous university in Prague. John Huss enrolled at that university as a student. He was a clever and capable student and studied hard with much enjoyment.

He was only thirty-one when they ordained him as a priest.

Two years later, they appointed him as principal of the university!

About the same time, the Roman hierarchy commissioned him to preach in the Bethlehem Chapel, and as we already know, he could preach exceptionally well. Because of that, Huss soon became quite an influential man in Prague. His fame spread far beyond Prague because the people came flocking from miles around to listen to Huss.

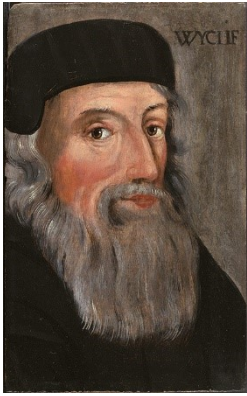
But it didn't take long for Huss to get enemies either!

Most of the teachers and professors at the university belonged to the order of Mendicant monks (see chapter 54). Mendicant monks were zealous Catholics, which you could *not* say of John Huss!

He did belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and he had no intention of breaking with them, but he disagreed with the Roman Catholic doctrine in many things.



*John Huss. 1372-1450.
Abramkj.com*



John Wycliffe 1328-1384
History today.com

Huss was a follower of Wycliffe. He strongly disapproved of the papacy's desire for control and opposed the monks' sinful and worldly lifestyle. He had read many of Wycliffe's writings and agreed with most of them.

At the University of Prague, they talked about Wycliffe a lot. But didn't Wycliffe preach in

England? Bohemia and England were quite distant, especially when modern transport and communication were still unknown. So how did those writings get to Bohemia?

ROYALTY HELPS

In 1382 Princess Anna, the sister of the Bohemian king, married the king of England. Anna migrated to England, and numerous Bohemian courtiers travelled with her. We know that the English king had always protected John Wycliffe. The royal house of England was friendly with Wycliffe. Now Anna's marriage united those two royal houses.

The English court eagerly read Wycliffe's writings. When Princess Anna settled in England, she also read the writings of Wycliffe. They made a deep impression on her, and she became a follower of Wycliffe.



King Richard II married princess Anna. *Wikipedia*

Through this marriage, friendly relationships developed between the English and Bohemian people. Many students from the university at Prague travelled to Oxford, a renowned university, and many students from Oxford travelled to Prague. That's how many of the

writings of Wycliffe got to Bohemia.

We see an example of God's providence here. The light of truth had shone clearly in England, for Wycliffe, that faithful preacher, had sown the seed of God's Word there.

And now God, the great Agriculturalist, began to sow in another part of Europe. In Bohemia, the Lord provided men who would shine the Light to pierce the darkness that was growing in God's Church.

Do you see the golden thread of God's reign in all this?

Princess Anna had only been the queen of England for a little while when she died. Her court returned to Bohemia and took Wycliffe's writings with them. The friendship between the English and Bohemian people continued. In this way, God opened the eyes of the Bohemian people more and more to the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church.

Many Waldensians also lived in Bohemia. They had fled there during the horrible persecutions they had experienced for so long. They continued their work of bringing the gospel to Bohemia. How wonderful are God's ways!



Anne tomb effigies.
Westminster Abbey Library

Who can comprehend God's wise management?

INCREDIBLE PAINTINGS

John Huss, the rector of the university, lived in Prague.

One day some young men knocked on the door of the Huss residence. Two English students from Oxford asked if they could speak to the professor. Huss received them kindly and asked how he could help them. They told him that they were students from Oxford and asked him if they were allowed to decorate the walls of the large hall in

his house with a few murals. Good-naturedly, Huss answered:

"Sure, go right ahead."

Thrilled, the English students began immediately. For days and days, they worked diligently. Finally, they finished it. John Huss came to look, and they showed him their work. And wow, it was well worth looking at! They had made some fantastic works of art!

They had painted the Lord Jesus as 'The Man of Sorrows' with a crown of thorns on His head on one wall. What a striking image of the suffering of Christ! The King of the Church stood there portrayed as inferior, mocked, whipped, scorned and insulted.

On the opposite wall, the students had painted the pope, a beautiful, triple crown on his head, clothed in purple and silk, surrounded by a retinue of servants who also wore the finest clothes.

Huss turned to the third wall and saw the Lord Jesus, pictured in plain garments. Next to Him stood Satan, who offered Him all the treasures of the world. But Jesus refused and spoke indignantly to him:
"Away with you, Satan!"

On the fourth wall, the painters had depicted the pope again. The emperor lay kneeled before him. The pope had his foot on the emperor's neck and was looking around proudly, saying:
"All power is given to me!"

Speechless with amazement, John Huss gazed at those murals for a long time. He immediately understood that these were extraordinary paintings with a deeper meaning behind them. They powerfully showed a stark contrast between the simplicity and humility of the 'Man of Sorrows' and the arrogant pride of the pope. These artists had portrayed the absolute truth. Deeply moved, Huss looked and looked. They were a clear sermon to him. These works of art strengthened him in his struggle with the Roman papacy.

It did not take long for the people of Prague to hear what kind of paintings decorated the walls of the home of John Huss. Many came to see them.

The murals were copied and widely distributed. The people appreciated them because they all realised that the paintings were so true!

Weren't there three popes at the same time right then who cursed each other in the name of Jesus Christ? One of them was even a former pirate! Their meaning was so clear that even a child could understand it.

Didn't all three popes live in luxury and affluence at the peoples' expense?

No wonder the people secretly enjoyed seeing those sins criticised so cleverly! Many of them had lost respect for the papal authority.

ENMITY AGAINST HUSS BEGINS TO GROW

Those English students had lots of courage. But John Huss had courage, too. His preaching in the Bethlehem Chapel was always earnest and sobering. He rebuked the people for their sins. He repeatedly admonished them to break with sin.

Huss openly declared that the Lord Jesus was the Head of the Church, *not* the pope! He even wrote a letter about that to the pope!

He did not spare the monks either. He spared no one, and from God's Word, he pointed out to everyone, without respect of persons, the way *back*, back to God's Word, back to *God's* laws and statutes. During the lessons at university, he constantly pointed this out to his students. This doctrine resulted in other professors and teachers becoming hostile toward

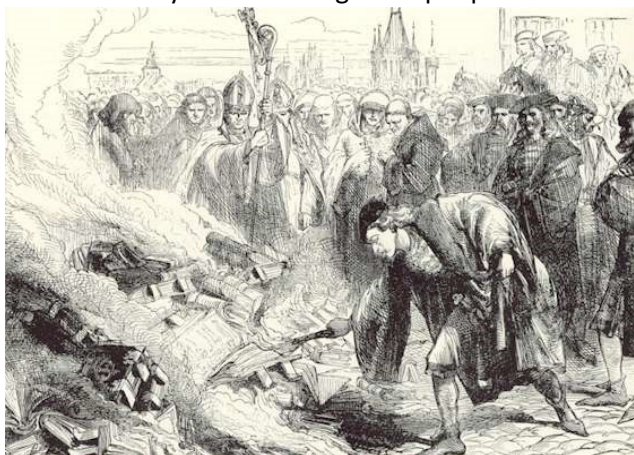


Bethlehem Chapel Prague. <http://www.digital-guide.cz/>

him. They complained about John Huss to the archbishop of Prague.

Several German students also studied at Prague university. When they left and returned to Germany, they told everyone that John Huss was a heretic! The archbishop of Prague, who had supported Huss, no longer dared to do so but ordered him not to preach in the Bethlehem Chapel. Huss paid no attention and continued his task.

The struggle became fiercer. The archbishop of Prague made a public show of burning two hundred of Wycliffe's writings. The people



200 of Wycliffe's books burned.
Biblemuseum.com

laughed about it and clearly demonstrated that they were on the side of Huss.

The pope, warned by the archbishop, commanded that John Huss come to Rome, summoning him to the papal judgment seat.

He did not go.

He was not *that* foolish!

His many friends also strongly advised him not to go to Rome. It was a good thing for John Huss that the king and queen of Bohemia supported him. The Bohemian nobility and people also supported Huss.

Despite all the enmity, Huss continued to preach in the Bethlehem Chapel. The pope, enraged because Huss refused to come to Rome, pronounced the anathema on him, and commanded the Bohemians to arrest him. This arrest never happened because the king and

nobility of Bohemia refused to carry out that command.

John Huss became increasingly bold in his actions and speech. He called the pope "A dog of the devil" and another time, "An enemy of Christ." When the Prague authorities refused to obey the pope, the pope punished the entire city by pronouncing the interdict on them all. We already know what that means! The bells were not allowed to toll to call the people to church services; they did not permit church funerals except for the clergy, children under two years and beggars; people could not marry in church and many other things.

So that he would not get Prague into more significant difficulties, and at the king's request, John Huss finally left the city and went to his place of birth, where the Bohemian knights protected him. But he continued to preach. Large crowds of people gathered to listen to him every time.

The Roman clergy became angrier and angrier, but their impotent rage did not hurt Huss. On the contrary, he became the leader of the Bohemian people!

Yet John Huss did not agree with Wycliffe in everything; he still believed in some Roman errors. For instance, he acknowledged the transubstantiation. He still thought that at the Lord's Supper, the bread changed into the flesh, and the wine changed into the blood of Christ. That was very sad.

John Wycliffe saw beyond that.

He did not believe in transubstantiation.

John Huss said that the communion cup must also be given to the laity, while Rome taught that the priest had to withhold the communion cup from the ordinary people.

Huss also continued to believe in purgatory and good works. He did not follow Wycliffe in this either. This lack of insight shows that Huss was a man of his time.

His conflict was especially against papal control and the corruption within the church. The confusion in Bohemia increased. The opposition

against the Roman Catholic Church increased visibly. How would that end?

Would the Roman Catholic Church finally realise that it was on the wrong path?

Would Rome finally acknowledge her errors? Oh no, whoever hopes that will be severely disappointed. Rome has *never* revoked one error! Instead of returning to the truth, Rome made every effort to *silence* that warning voice! And alas, they were successful. How?

We will find out in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the two stipulations regarding the use of the new Church building in Prague?
2. Summarise the life of John Huss up to the point of his selection as bishop of Bethlehem Chapel.
3. Explain the connection between the English and the Bohemians.
4. State the two reasons in God's providence why many Bohemians became concerned about the corruption in the Church.
5. What lesson did John Huss learn from the picture drawn by the Oxford students?
6. Huss primarily focused on two evils in the Church of his time. State these two.
7. What methods did Huss use to oppose these errors?
8. How did the Roman clergy react?
9. Why did Huss leave Prague?
10. Which heresies did Huss still believe in?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What do the stipulations regarding the new church in Prague tell us about the man who had it built?
2. Why can Huss also be called a forerunner of the Reformation?

REVIEW

Activity — Match doctrines and practices with the correct individuals. Use the information provided in your text.

Place the correct symbol in front of each statement: Wy= Wycliffe Hu= Huss N= Neither B= Both.

1. Called the pope an antichrist.
2. Denied purgatory.
3. Spoke against the control of the pope.
4. Acknowledged transubstantiation.
5. Believed that revelation was more important than God's Word.
6. Believed that the ordinary people should hear God's Word in their own tongue.
7. Promoted faith healing.
8. Stated that the bread and wine signify the body and blood of the Lord Jesus.
9. Opposed the Roman hierarchy.
10. Taught that the people should search the Scriptures.
11. Resented the lust for money displayed by the clergy.
12. Believed in the Millenium.
13. Believed that rulers need not pay taxes imposed by the pope.
14. Believed that the communion cup must also be given to the laity.
15. Received opposition from the Mendicant monks.
16. Stated that Christ is the Head of His Church.
17. Urged the people to repentance, to forsake sin.
18. Opposed the indulgence.
19. Opposed the veneration of relics and image worship.

20. Encouraged people to believe that scourging themselves could aid in their salvation.

RESEARCH TOPICS

1. Read an account of the Inquisition. Write diary entries for one week, showing the severity.

2 Choose one of the following letters to write:

a. You are the pope and wish to inform Philip IV of your authority over the temporary rulers.

Remember: he has challenged your authority.

b. You are Philip IV. Write a reply in which you assert your authority over your people and defy the pope's right to interfere in your realm.