

The Great Controversy Series

10 John Huss and Jerome: Martyrs for the Truth

Mark 13:19-20 "For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. ²⁰

"And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

In the period of papal supremacy from 538 to 1798, believers were persecuted and tortured because they believed and practiced something different than what the Catholic Church taught. Because the Bible was prohibited from place to place the people were left in darkness. Those who sought light read their Bibles and worshipped secretly. When caught, these people were thrown in jail and martyred. Millions of people thus lost their lives. This was the time of tribulation that Jesus spoke about.

But Jesus said that those day would be shortened. How would that period be shortened? The Protestant Reformation was one of the means that the Lord would use. The Protestant Reformation did not burst on the scene suddenly. For centuries there were pioneer reformers. We talked about the Waldenses. John Wycliffe was the Morning Star of the Reformation.

John Wycliffe's writings and ideas extended beyond the borders of England. They went to far away countries. The king of Bohemia Wenzel IV's sister Anna, after her marriage with King Richard II of England, Bohemian nobles who studied at Oxford, began to bring John Wycliffe's writings to Prague. One of them was a student named Jerome. Jerome, shared Wycliffe's writings with a young and dedicated Catholic priest named John Huss.

When John Huss was still young, his father died. His mother was a pious woman and desired for her child the fear of God and education. After Huss finished his local school he went to Prague University. Because he was poor, he went on a poverty scholarship. Ellen White wrote the following in her book, *The Great Controversy*:

He was accompanied on the journey to Prague by his mother; widowed and poor, she had no gifts of worldly wealth to bestow upon her son, but as they drew near to the great city, she kneeled down beside the fatherless youth and invoked for him the blessing of their Father in heaven. Little did that mother realize how her prayer was to be answered.

Are you a father, a mother? What do you want for your children? Riches? Fame? Position in society? What do you want in this transient world? Look, the Catholic Church was in a terrible condition. There was every kind of evil and superstition. There was no freedom of conscience as far as religion goes, the people could not read the Bible for themselves. But in the Catholic Church there is a widow woman whose heart is open to God and who is of strong piety. With her

whole heart and sincerity she kneels and prays for her child. What did she want from the Lord? She wanted God's blessings for her child.

The Almighty God, to do great things in His cause, passes over the advantaged, the noble, the powerful but proud and selects common but humble people. How the prophet Samuel's mother Hanna prayed for years for a child! And when the Lord showed mercy to her, what did Hanna do? She dedicated her child to the Lord.

In the Bible, Abraham's sins and mistakes are before our eyes. But there is nothing like this concerning Samuel. I am not saying he was sinless but what a great man he was! His mother prayed for him. You, mother, father, perhaps you are not a very important person in this world. Perhaps you have no money to speak of. But who knows, perhaps a person will come from you that will change the world. Did you dedicate your child to the Lord? Are your actions in harmony with that? For your child's future are you teaching your child to love God? Or is your nose always on the internet and you are ignoring your child? If a change is necessary in your life why not do something about it now?

At the university John Huss was a hard-working and successful student. He was heavily devoted to the Catholic Church and after graduation, in the 1400 he became a Catholic priest. In a short time he began to serve the king. He became a professor at the college he graduated from and later in 1409 he became its president.

After 1402, as a priest in the Bethlehem church of old Prague, he began to preach and perform ceremonies in the Czech language, and he pioneered having hymns sung in the people's native tongue. The founder of the Bethlehem chapel had wanted this from its beginning. The gospel had come to Bohemia in the 9th century and the Bible had been translated into the local tongue. Sermons were in the language of the people. But Rome came against this. Pope Gregory VII prohibited sermons in the local tongue. The pope said, "it was pleasing to the Omnipotent that His worship should be celebrated in an unknown language, and that many evils and heresies had arisen from not observing this rule." (Wylie, b. 3, ch. 1)

With what frequency throughout history have religious leaders hidden the religion sources in an unknown language to keep the people in darkness, dependent on them, and maintain them under their own control. If you are not able to read the sources for yourself then you are prisoner to other people's thoughts. Now let's think. Do you want to leave your eternal destiny in the hands of another? O.K., if you are able to read the sources in your own language but because you are absorbed in social media you don't read them, what difference is there than if the religion sources were in an unknown language? It means you still don't know them. You must read the Bible for yourself.

Although the papacy had prohibited preaching in the language of the people, in some places in Bohemia as in the Bethlehem church, it was done. Jerome shared Wycliffe's writings with Huss. At that time some others came from England and spoke against the supremacy of the papacy.

They were immediately silenced but they made two pictures. In one picture, Jesus was riding into Jerusalem in simplicity on a donkey. In the other, the pope was entering a city with a majestic ceremony dressed in gorgeous robes. They put these pictures out in the open. The lesson was unmistakable and many people were influenced by them. One of them was Huss. He began to investigate Wycliffe's writings more closely.

Huss was teaching the Bible and many students from Germany upon returning to their country brought the gospel there and the truth spread. The papacy learned what Huss was doing and called Huss to appear before the pope in Rome. To go there would mean certain death. The king, queen, nobles and state officials requested that Huss remain in Prague and be interrogated by a representative of the papacy. The pope rejected this. Without hearing Huss, the pope condemned him and put the city of Prague under interdict.

Now we need to understand something. In those days, such an interdict would terrify the people. Why? The people had been taught to look to the pope as to God. If the people couldn't join in the religious services then the doors of heaven were shut to them. The papacy could send someone to heaven or to hell. It was as if the people's eternal salvation was in the hands of the religious leaders. Wherever that thought is found then the basic freedoms given by God to people are trampled.

In Prague, many people accused Huss and wanted him to be turned over to Rome. Huss withdrew for a time from Prague to let the tumult settle. Huss still viewed the pope as the vicar of Christ on earth and the papacy as unerring. Huss was not against the church, he was against the abuses within the church. But the papacy had outlawed the preaching of the gospel. How could an unerring church do that he wondered. Huss saw that the leaders were corrupt as they had been in Jesus' day. So he came to this conclusion: It is not the church speaking through priests that controls the conscience but the Lord speaking through His word.

Later, Huss returned to Prague and continued preaching the gospel in the Bethlehem church. Jerome was a help to him and together they taught the Lord's truth in the Bible and many people turned from darkness to light. Their influence did not remain in Bohemia but also went to other countries. They had many enemies but the king, queen and many nobles were on their side.

At that time there were three people who were struggling for power by claiming themselves to be pope. They each had their supporters and they pronounced anathemas on one another. Each pope gathered funds to obtain weapons and soldiers to establish their position. Europe was in turmoil. While Huss was condemning the abuses and errors of the church, the people accused Rome's leaders as being the cause of the tumult.

Huss was accused again and again an interdict against Prague was announced. Huss once again withdrew from Prague to his own village.

The Emperor Sigismund urged the pope to call a council to settle the schism in the church and to root out heresy. The pope and the two anti-popes along with Huss were called to the council. Sigismund and the pope gave Huss a safe conduct for the council. In spite of this Huss wrote a letter to his friends in Prague declaring that his life was in danger. Doubting that he would see them again he asked the Lord to give him courage to speak truths and to be a martyr. Thus Huss went to the Council of Constance.

At the council the pope was arrested and the anti-popes were rejected. Despite the safe conduct from the Emperor, Huss was soon arrested and thrown into a loathsome dungeon. Later he was taken to a castle as a prisoner. Many nobles protested that Sigismund violated the safe conduct afforded to Huss. But Huss's enemies convinced Sigismund to do it.

Huss later was brought to the council. Because Huss had been in a dungeon he was sick nearly to death. In that condition, in front of the Emperor, the church and state leaders, Huss courageously protested the corruptions of the church hierarchy. The council wanted Huss to say that what he had taught was wrong but Huss declined to do so. The bishops cursed and humiliated Huss in front of everyone. They put a miter on his head that had pictures of demons and the writing, "Arch-heretic." Afterwards the bishops said to him, "We commit your soul to Satan." With a big crowd, they led Huss to the place of execution. Again they wanted Huss to renounce his errors. "What errors shall I renounce?" he said. "I know of none. God as my witness, everything that I have written and preached is to save people from sin and condemnation." On July 6, 1415, together with his books, Huss was burned alive while he sang hymns. Thus Rome's cruelty and principles were displayed before everyone.

Jerome also was arrested a short time later. He was bound in a horrible position in the dungeon and suffered greatly being fed only bread and water. He became sick and stayed in that state for a year. He was brought before the council and as he considered Huss's end his courage broke. Jerome consented to the council's decision and except for a few things, accepted the council's condemnation of the views of Huss and Wycliffe. He promised to remain faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church. But his confession did not satisfy the judges. He was thrown again into prison and again brought before the council. They wanted a complete denial from Jerome.

But Jerome's conscience was stricken. He asked to speak to the assembly. Permission granted, emaciated, sick and alone, the man prayed and denied his earlier recantation. In a way that surprised the church leaders he condemned their corruptions, pride and sins. The bishops were enraged. In the place where they burned Huss, they burned Jerome alive.

Huss and Jerome's execution filled the people with horror. By edict of the papacy, Wycliffe's writings were burned. But the ones that were secretly hidden were taken out and read. Sigismund and the papacy worked together to destroy the movement and Sigismund sent his armies. Again and again armies and crusades came against the Hussites but the Lord helped them.

Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of force. In Babylon, if the people did not worship the statue that king Nebuchadnesser set up then they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Worship was forced. In Europe, it was forbidden to teach or worship in a manner other than what the Catholic Church taught. It was forbidden to preach or read the Bible in a known language so that the church's wrong doctrines and practices would not be exposed. In the area of religion, freedom of conscience was greatly restricted. Huss and Jerome were burned alive because they exposed the Catholic Church's corruptions and taught God's word in the language of the people.

The Bible tells us that in the last days, just prior to Jesus's second coming that a rule of worship will once again be enforced. Religious liberty will be restricted. Then it will not be valid just in Europe, but in the whole world.

Revelation 13:14-15 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. ¹⁵ He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

God is love. His law is love. He does not accept a service that does not originate in love. The rules of the Lord are life. In the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the following understanding will come out:

Revelation 15:3-4 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints! ⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* alone *are* holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."

The kingdom of Satan is founded on selfishness. Everything that is founded on selfishness will not stand. Thus all the kingdoms of earth shall end. They will sink in their own sin. If the Lord withdraws His restraining Spirit, the scenes of Jerusalem's fall will be repeated. The end of the world will be like that. In the meantime, what does the Lord say?

Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

You come too! God's love is calling you!