

SARDIS: The Reformation Church

Martin Luther in Germany (1483-1546)

Martin Luther, the son of a German craftsman, enrolled in the University of Erfurt to study law. Caught in a severe thunderstorm and fearing that lightning might strike him dead, Luther decided that he must find peace with God. Soon afterward, he entered an Augustinian monastery, a Roman Catholic organization for priests and monks. Consecrated as a Roman Catholic monk in 1506, the year he became a priest. In 1508, he began teaching at the University of Wittenberg, Germany. Despite his religious service he still lacked peace with God.

During a visit to Rome in 1510, Luther was appalled by the corruption that he saw in the papal court. In those days only special clergy had access to the Scriptures, but Luther was a university professor and his religious position as a priest gave him that privilege. As he read the Scriptures, Luther discovered truths that changed his life. Romans 1:17—"The just shall live by faith"—gripped his heart as he realized that only faith in Christ, not the Roman sacraments, could save anyone.

Luther had no desire to leave the Catholic church; his desire was to protest the errors within the church so that reform could take place.

Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528)

A German-born Protestant pastor in Switzerland, joined the Anabaptist movement. He was rebaptized on Easter, 1525, and led almost the whole city of Waldshut into the Anabaptist movement. Hubmaier was a well-educated, brilliant writer and eloquent speaker. He wrote that Christians should cooperate with and be active in civil affairs. He baptized 2000 converts in Moravia. Persecuted by both the Protestant churches and Catholics, he fled to Moravia, where he and his wife were arrested and imprisoned. He was later burned to death in a public square in Vienna; his wife was drowned in the Danube River.

William Tyndale (1494-1536)

William Tyndale could speak seven languages and was proficient in ancient Hebrew and Greek. He was a priest whose intellectual gifts and disciplined life could have taken him a long way in the church—had he not had one compulsion: to teach English men and women the good news of justification by faith. Tyndale had discovered this doctrine when he read Erasmus's Greek edition of the New Testament. What better way to share this message with his countrymen than to put an English version of the New Testament into their hands? This, in fact, became Tyndale's life passion, aptly summed up in the words of his mentor, Erasmus: "Christ desires his mysteries to be published abroad as widely as possible. I would that [the Gospels and the epistles of Paul] were translated into all languages, of all Christian people, and that they might be read and known.

Tyndale was a native of Gloucester and began his studies at Oxford in 1510, later moving on to Cambridge.

By 1523 his passion had been ignited; in that year he sought permission and funds from the bishop of London to translate the New Testament. The bishop denied his request, and further queries convinced Tyndale the project would not be welcomed anywhere in England.

To find a hospitable environment, he traveled to the free cities of Europe—Hamburg, Wittenberg, Cologne, and finally to the Lutheran village of Worms. There, in 1525, his New Testament emerged: the first translation from Greek into the English language.

John Knox in Scotland (1514-1572)

The Scottish reformer John Knox became a Catholic priest in 1536. Early in the 1540s, he became a follower of Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart, who preached Lutheran doctrine in the Roman Catholic Scotland. Knox witnessed the martyrdom of these two men. Soon thereafter, Knox was arrested and made a galley slave, forced to row a French battleship with other slaves whole chained to his post. A year and a half later, Knox was returned to Scotland in a prisoner exchange, where he became a royal chaplain. But when Mary Tudor (Catholic) became Queen of England, Knox fled to Europe, where he was strongly influenced by the teaching of John Calvin.

Scottish nobles, meeting in Edinburgh in December 1557, covenanted together to combat the idolatry of Roman Catholicism and establish the Word of God in Scotland t lead these *Covenanters*. *John Knox prayed, Give me Scotland, or I die.* God answered that prayer, and in 1560 Knox led the *Scottish Parliament*, which outlawed the Roman Catholic mass and ended papal rule over the Scottish church.

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

Many Puritans were imprisoned for refusing to attend the services of the Church of England. John Bunyan (1628-1688), the most famous persecuted Puritan, dared to preach the Gospel without the sanction of the Church of England. As a result, he was imprisoned for over 10 years in the Bedford jail, where he wrote the famous allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*, which influenced and blessed thousands of believers. For many years, *Pilgrim Progress* ranked next to the Bible as a bestseller.

Many of the English Puritans preferred to stay within England's state church, hoping they could "purify" the Church of England from worldliness and its resemblances to the Roman church. However, others called Separatist (later Dissenters) were similar to the Anabaptists in that they insisted on remaining "separate" from the state churches.

Roger Williams (1603-1683)

A Puritan preacher with strong Baptist convictions, believed that the church should not be controlled by the state. His influence later caused the new American government to grant religious freedom to individuals as well as to churches.

Williams strongly urged that government should not have any control over the church. Thus he helped prevent the formation of a state church in the new land of America. Americans continue to enjoy the fruit of the efforts of Roger Williams and others like him who influenced our government to give freedom of religion to churches and individuals.

A.D. 30	100	300	500	approximate dates	1500	1700	1900	?
Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamos	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea		
"desirable"	"crushed"	"married"	"continual sacrifice"	"remnant"	"brotherly love"	"rights or rule of the people"		
Apostolic church	Persecuted church	Worldly, imperial church	Pagan, papal church	Reformation church	Revival, missionary church	Lukewarm, tolerant, ecumenical church		