

## ***How the Bible Came to Us - #14***

# ***Awakening and Renaissance in Europe***

1. We look next at events that took place on the continent of Europe. In Bohemia (now in the Czech Republic) as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Bible had been translated into the local language (vernacular) and worship was conducted in that language. However, “reforms” brought in some 200 years later, around 1080, by Pope Gregory VII forbade worship in local languages.
2. Persecution being carried out in northwestern Italy and southern France forced many of the Waldenses to flee from that area and move to Bohemia. While not able to worship openly in Bohemia, behind the scenes those immigrants quietly and secretly conducted their work of sharing Scripture.
3. Jan Huss (also known as John Huss) (1373-1415) was born in Hussenic (thus, his name). After his father died, his mother was determined to give him a good education. He entered the University of Prague as a charity scholar and received his masters degree in 1396. Within two years he was lecturing at the university. Huss was a very faithful Roman Catholic and soon became a priest.
4. In 1382, England’s King Richard II married Anne of Bohemia, and thus, the ideas of Wycliffe invaded Bohemia as well. Huss began to read and study Wycliffe’s works. After becoming a priest in 1400, he was soon made Dean of the philosophy faculty at the University of Prague and then he became Rector of the university in 1402.
5. But his reputation grew primarily because he upheld the Czech tradition of preaching in the vernacular language in the local Bethlehem Chapel.
6. Huss became so concerned about corruption within the church that he began translating the works of Wycliffe into the Bohemian language. Huss’s strong attachment to the ideas of Wycliffe soon brought him opposition among his university colleagues and his efforts to reform the Church brought him into conflict with the clergy. So, in 1408 he was forbidden to function as a Catholic priest.
7. Because of his careful study of the Bible and his acquaintance with events within the Roman church, Huss was faced with a terrible conflict. He believed that the church was the voice of God on earth, but how could it be teaching error at the same time. Finally, he concluded that just as in the days of Jesus the clergy were the ones who had corrupted things. Thus, God speaking directly through the words of Scripture—and not the priests speaking through the church—was to be the individual’s ultimate authority.
8. About that time there were two contenders for the papacy. Huss was chosen to represent Bohemia at the council to try to resolve the issue. Because Huss’s stand involved greater independence for Bohemia, he alienated many of the non-Czechs among the clergy.
9. After being reelected as Rector of the university in 1409, formal charges of heresy were brought against him. Pope Alexander V condemned Wycliffeism as heresy and forbade public preaching in the local language. No doubt, the decree was primarily aimed at Huss. Finally, Huss was excommunicated in 1411; but he could not be silenced. When most of the Prague citizens rallied to his support, an interdict was issued from the Pope forbidding ecclesiastical services and burial in consecrated ground within Prague.
10. Huss condemned the practices of the pope when one of the popes (there were then three

contenders) offered indulgences, trying to raise money and enlist men to help him fight against his neighbor (Ladislaus of Naples). Huss was forced to leave Prague.

11. A prolonged (1414-1418) church council took place primarily to resolve the conflicts within the church, especially between the papal claimants. Huss was summoned to appear. In spite of a promise of safe conduct by the Emperor Sigismund, Huss was immediately jailed. For seven months he received little opportunity to respond to any of the accusations against him. When he did, he always responded with Scripture. Finally, the church authorities handed him over to the local secular authorities and almost immediately, he was defrocked and burned at the stake in 1418.
12. Not long thereafter, his companion and fellow preacher, Jerome, was summoned before the council. At first, Jerome faltered and agreed to a condemnation of the works of Huss; but later, Jerome recanted that mistake and spoke out strongly in Huss's favor. Soon, he was forced to follow his mentor to the stake.
13. Secular events in the world surrounding Europe also had an enormous impact on the history of the Bible. In 1453, Constantinople, formerly the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church, fell to the Muslims under the Ottoman Empire. A great number of Greek scholars—who took with them treasured documents in Greek and Arabic—fled to western Europe. That stimulated a new interest in the Greek language and the earlier documents of Christianity.
14. Also among the documents which came to western Europe were included the original dialogues of Plato and the works of Aristotle and Porphyry in their original language. The study of those ancient philosophers stimulated a new Renaissance of intellectualism in western Europe.
15. During the Middle Ages, it was assumed that the Roman Catholic interpretation of the relationship between the church and the state was the only possible interpretation. But it became apparent that there were other ways of thinking and doing things.
16. Scholars began to claim that Greek was superior to Latin; that the Greek Scriptures were earlier and more authentic than the Latin; and that Plato, in fact, was superior to many of the teachings of the Church.
17. The church's teaching had been that human existence on this earth was but a "fleeting moment between two eternities." They wanted people to focus on the church's control over their future destiny. But the Greeks had focused on life on this earth.
18. Thus, the Renaissance came about—focusing on human ideas, human accomplishments, even human art. Those were the days of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci.
19. But certain advances in science and invention were to have an enormous impact also. Block printing had been invented and used in early China in A.D. 888. By 1041 they had invented movable clay type. They even came up with a printing press made of iron by 1234. Europeans first used block wooden printing by the year 1423.
20. But Johannes Gutenberg (1398-1468) is credited with inventing printing because of four new advances and inventions which he put together. He developed movable metal type, oil-based inks, a mold for casting individual letter types accurately, and a new kind of printing press based on the presses used for squeezing wine from grapes.
21. As his first major project, Gutenberg took upon himself the printing of the Latin Vulgate. In many ways while that new process allowed much faster reproduction, the results were little

different from the handwritten copies that preceded them. Gutenberg produced 180 copies of his document by the year 1454. Forty-five of them were on vellum and 135 were on paper. Sixty of those copies are still available.

22. They still looked like manuscripts. There was no pagination, word spacing, indentation, or paragraph breaks. Chapter divisions for the Bible had been inserted into the Vulgate by Stephen Langton in 1205 and later were introduced into some Greek manuscripts by the year 1400. But chapters were not included in printed Bibles until 1565.
23. Because of printing it became theoretically possible for Bibles to be produced at a much lower cost and with much more consistent and stable wording.
24. For the first time, reading of the Bible became a significant possibility instead of just hearing it read and interpreted by some church authority.
25. It was not long before people reading Scripture recognize that the Greek manuscripts, in fact, were from an earlier source than the Latin. Several different groups determined to produce parallel Bibles with two or more languages side-by-side for comparison.
26. The most famous of those was probably the Complutensian Polyglot produced in Spain by Cardinal Ximenez between 1514 and 1522. His polyglot Old Testament had the Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, and a Latin interlinear.
27. There was a rush to produce the best possible Greek manuscripts for people to study and compare with what was being taught by the Church. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469?-1536) was the first to produce a Greek manuscript of the New Testament based on late and "mediocre" manuscripts.
28. All of these developments led to a tension between scholar and priest, University and church, that has not been resolved even in our day.
29. Whereas the Roman Church had declared the Latin Vulgate to be the official Scriptures of the church, the presence and availability of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts based on a much older tradition than the Latin raised many questions and challenged the church's idea of the Vulgate's supremacy.

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