STUDY PAK 13

THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND

"He was at first all heart for the Church of Rome; he went barefoot on pilgrimages, wrote against Luther, and flattered the pope. But before long he grew tired of Rome without desiring the Reformation: profoundly selfish, he cared for himself alone. If papal domination offended him, evangelical liberty annoyed him. He meant to remain master in his own house, the only master and master of all. Even without the divorce, Henry would possibly have separated from Rome. Rather than endure any contradiction, he put to death friends and enemies, bishops and missionaries, ministers of state and favorites – even his wives."

~~J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, *The Reformation in England*, Vol. II~~

I. SETTING THE STAGE

There were three primary influences on the Reformation in England. The first was _____ _____such as John Wycliffe and William Tyndale. The Scriptures were available in the English language and the English culture was more influenced by the Bible than that of any other country.

A second major influence came through _____ _____and _____. These teachers began to call for reform and change within the Catholic Church. At first the government of England resisted these calls for change.

The third was _____. Henry VIII, King of England, was a man of learning, dynamic leadership, and charisma. He was also a man whose private life was controlled by moral impurity and who was capable of wild emotional outbursts. It was not unheard of for King Henry, in a fit or rage, to order someone's execution and later exhibit tremendous remorse and regret over the death. At

first he was a strong supporter of the Roman Catholic Church. He even wrote a book refuting the teachings of Martin Luther. The Catholic Church honored him for this with the "Defender of the Faith" award.

Henry had not originally trained to be the King of England. Rather, his older brother, Arthur, was trained to be king and a marriage alliance was made between him and Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Arthur's marriage to their daughter, Catherine, was designed to guarantee peace between England and Spain. Henry had been trained to be a clergyman, eventually with the intention of becoming the archbishop of England. This was a planned arrangement designed to generate a workable cooperation between powers, having one brother as King of England and the other as archbishop. Only four moths after his marriage to Catherine, however, Arthur died. Following his brother's death, Henry VIII was then married to Catherine and soon became king.

II. THE WIVES OF HENRY VIII

Henry and Catherine had only one child, Mary, leaving Henry with no legitimate son to succeed him. An heir to the throne was of great importance. Occasions when there is no heir to the throne often result _____. Henry became quite anxious over the issue of not having a son and he began to appeal to the Pope for a specially granted divorce. This situation presented a complicated problem for the Pope. While he needed the support of Henry VIII, as king of England, he also needed the support of Catherine's uncle, Charles V, who was the King of Spain and Italy. Clearly, Charles V would not accept this insult to his niece, for whom he seemed to carry a genuine affection. Having no good answer, the Pope gave no answer at all, stalling this process for years. During this time, Henry became enamored with a young Protestant woman named Anne Boleyn. Henry had multiple mistresses and sons and daughters out of wedlock. Anne Boleyn resisted Henry's attentions for six years. She refused to participate in any romantic entanglement with Henry because he was married. In one letter, responding to Henry's romantic overtures, Anne replied:

> "I think, most noble and worthy king, your majesty speaks these words in mirth to prove me…I will rather lose my life than my virtue."

Many history books have portrayed Anne as Henry's mistress. Even a Hollywood mini-series was produced portraying her as Henry's mistress. There is no evidence for this and it is entirely contrary to historical records. Anne Later wrote:

> "I understand not, most mighty king, how you should retain any such hope; your wife I cannot be, both in respect of mine own unworthiness, and also because you have a queen already. Your mistress I will not be."

Meanwhile, Henry despaired of ever being granted his divorce from the Pope. He began to seek political alliances with those who wanted a Reformed church in England. He announced that the English church was free from Rome and that, as king, he was also head of the church. All Roman Catholic Church property was confiscated. Much of this property was given to the new Church of England, but some was sold and the money filled the coffers of the government of England. Henry required the religious leaders of his kingdom to sign a statement recognizing him as the head of the church. Henry's closest friend throughout childhood, Thomas Moore, waw not holding the position of archbishop, the position for which Henry had originally been trained. Thomas Moore refused to recognize the authority of the king to lead the church and was beheaded at Henry's command. Henry punished those who stayed loyal to Roman Catholicism and also any independent churches.

Henry had also now opened a way for his pursuit of Anne Boleyn. Had Anne actually been immoral, these events of her life would never have occurred. Rather, Anne would have just been another one of the king's many mistresses, and then forgotten. After six years, though, of longing for Anne Boleyn and writing of how he could not live without her, etc., Henry granted his own divorce and soon was married to Anne Boleyn. They had one daughter, Elizabeth. Quickly, Henry tired of Anne (this woman he could not live without) and had her falsely accused of adultery with her pastor. He had them both beheaded. Anne's last words were:

> "Good Christian people, I am not come here to justify myself; I leave my justification entirely to Christ, in whom I put my trust. I will accuse no man, nor speak anything of that whereof I am accused, as I know full well that aught that I could say in my defense doth not appertain unto you, and that I could draw no hope of life from the same. I come here only to die, according as I have been condemned. I commend my judges to the Lord's mercy. I pray God (and I beg

> you to do the same) to save the king and send him long to reign over you, for a gentler or more merciful prince there never was. To me he was ever a good, gentle, and sovereign lord. And thus I take my leave of the world and of you, and I heartily desire you all to pray for me. O Lord, have mercy upon me! To God I commit my soul!"

Anne, who had written much about her faith in Christ, gave ample evidence that she was genuinely born again. She had become caught up in circumstances well beyond her control. The current depiction of Anne by Hollywood is completely false and unjustified.

Henry then married another Protestant young lady named Jane Seymour. She bore him a son named Edward, but she died shortly after childbirth. During this time two distinct groups developed within the Church of England. One group was called the Anglo-Catholics. They wanted to keep all the doctrines of Catholicism, including salvation by works, but substitute the king for the pope. The Protestant group wanted to teach salvation by faith and encourage the people to read the Bible. Henry's Protestant wives made it easier for this group to make progress.

Following Jane's death, Henry married Princess Anne of the German state of Cleves. She was a Lutheran. She did not speak English and they got along poorly. They soon divorced and she returned to Germany. Henry then married Catherine Howard. Catherine was soon caught genuinely committing adultery, and paid for her mistake, not surprisingly, with her head. (However, the frequent adulteries of Henry were conveniently ignored.)

Henry proposed to Christina of Denmark. She refused him saying,

> "I have but one head; if I had two, one of them should be at the service of His majesty."

Henry's representatives then proposed to another European princess. She declined on the grounds that her neck "was far too delicate to serve as Queen of England." Henry then married Catherine Parr. Catherine was twice a widow. She had been married to one of Henry's generals who died in battle and then to one of his admirals who was lost at sea. Catherine had a reputation as a devout Christian woman.

Henry was, by this point, in poor health; his body wracked by several diseases (including venereal diseases). Catherine became his loving, caring companion comforting him during his declining years. She also knew Christ and boldly testified to her personal salvation by faith. One of Catherine's methods for testifying was to write Scripture verses about salvation by faith on pieces of paper and hand them to people in the royal palace. The Anglo-Catholic leadership complained about this, but Henry ordered them to quietly listen to her. While Henry did tell Catherine to stop passing out the verses, he required all of the Anglo-Catholic leadership to assemble in the royal chapel. There he offered Catherine all the time she wanted to speak to them about any subject she chose. Catherine, of course, chose to explain salvation by faith to the gathered Anglo-Catholic leadership – a captive audience.

Through Catherine's patient, loving care, Henry had developed a respect and tenderness toward her. During the last days of his life, Henry professed his personal faith in Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. Because of Catherine's testimony, it is entirely possible that Henry VIII was genuinely saved in the last days of his life.

III. KING EDWARD

Edward succeeded his father as king at the age of 9. Possessing character rarely found in royalty, Edward was a moral, devout evangelical. He strengthened the Protestant wing of the English church and suspended persecution of the independent churches. Unfortunately, Edward died after only six years as king.

IV. LADY JANE GREY

The story of Lady Jane Grey illustrates clearly the type of political intrigue which was common during this time. Parliament had authorized King Henry VIII to nominate his successor to the throne. With his son Edward the obvious heir, Henry selected his two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth to succeed him if Edward died and left no heirs. Should these three rule and die without heirs (a remote possibility), Henry directed that the throne then pass to the family of his younger sister (another Mary).

This younger sister died, leaving behind a daughter, Lady Jane Grey. Jane was an amazingly gifted and highly educated young woman. By the age of eleven, she was corresponding with leaders of the Reformation in continental Europe. These letters of theological discussion still exist in Switzerland. Through the established chain of successors, Jane could become the Queen of England if Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth died without children.

During the early part of 1553, young King Edward, at the age of 15, was dying. Upon his death, the next in line of succession was Mary, a passionate Catholic. Mary was the daughter of the first Queen Catherine who was deposed in order to disestablish the Catholic Church. Mary grew up with a tremendous resentment of that and a deep loyalty to the Catholic Church. The Duke of Northumberland, a devout Protestant, did not want England brought back under Catholicism, thus he initiated a play to bypass Mary and Elizabeth who were both Catholics and the legal heirs to the throne. As next in line for the throne, he intended to install Jane as Queen in their place. Of course, that was not the way the law was written, but the Duke of Northumberland and all those involved considered it to be justifiable. Part of Northumberland's plan, however, included Jane marrying his own son, conveniently making him father to the king. The plan had initially appeared to be a noble cause to prevent Catholic control of England but the Duke's private arrangement for Jane to marry his son, added a suspicious complication to his motives. This marriage took place with the complicity of her parents, but against Jane's will. Jane had no vision of becoming royalty, but at the age of 16, she was to be married in a royal wedding to a man she did not know, and crowned Queen of England.

As the plot unfolded, an attempt to kidnap Mary failed. Mary had been forewarned and fled to Norfolk, allowing her time to appeal for help.

Queen Mary did not want to execute Jane and made an attempt to save her by involving her in a public debate in the Tower. Mary had hoped the papal advisors could persuade Jane that she was wrong. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* records this event. Lady Jane Grey was

no mere uneducated country girl. She defended the evangelical faith with a clarity so profound that her opponents were left speechless.

The debate ended with the young woman standing head and shoulders above the Roman debaters. Queen Mary now saw Jane as a major threat to her throne. There was only one avenue left to Mary, and that was to remove Jane Grey permanently from the stage…by death.

On February 12th, 1554, Lady Jane Grey went to the block in the Tower of London proclaiming the message of Christ. The night before she died, she sent a copy of the Greek Testament to her sister Katherine. Urging her to read it, she wrote,

> "It shall teach you to live, and learn you to die. It shall win you more than you should have gained by the possession of your woeful father's lands."

From her window, Jane saw her young husband being led away to execution. From that same window, later she saw his headless body being brought back in a cart. She exclaimed,

> "Oh Guildford, the pain you have tasted, and I shall soon taste, is nothing to the feast you and I shall partake of this day in Paradise."

The Jane herself was led out, a small sandy-haired girl dressed in a gown and a velvet cover on her head. Her last words were:

> "Good people – I am come here to die…I wash my hands in innocence, before God. Bear witness that I die a true Christian woman, and that I look to be saved by none other means, but only by the mercy of God _____ _____. I thank God for His goodness that He hath thus given me a time to repent. While I am alive, assist me with your prayers."

After giving this incredible testimony of the saving grace of God, Jane quoted a Psalm and handed her gloves and handkerchief to her maid. The brutal executioner was shaken. He was not prepared for this. He was accustomed to victims cursing and resisting but this was a beautiful, young Christian woman, gentle and innocent – and only sixteen years old! "Forgive me," he begged her. Jane replied, "You are forgiven. Do your work quickly."

She then tied a handkerchief over her eyes. Putting her hands out, she could not feel the block and cried out, "Where is it? What shall I do?" An onlooker helped her to find the block. She then laid her head on the block and said, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Hollywood has chosen to depict Lady Jane Grey as a silly vain teenager with no idea what was happening around her. In reality, while she was naïve in relation to some of the events, she was far from a silly vain teenager. She was a serious dedicated servant of the Lord Jesus. She got caught in circumstances beyond her control. It is difficult for Hollywood to understand this type of faith. Of course, to look to Hollywood for your history, current events, morals, or anything else, is surely not wise.

V. BLOODY MARY

Edward's oldest half-sister, Mary, became the Queen of England. She devoted her life to restoring England to the Roman Catholic Church. She had many leaders of the Church of England burned at the stake. Ironically, several of those same leaders had previously supported burning Baptists and other independent believers at the stake. In fact, an archbishop, who had remarked that he looked forward to seeing Baptists and Brownists being burned at the stake, was taken and burnt at the stake himself. Just as Zwingli, famous for having believers put to death, faced execution by being drawn and quartered, these persecutors now reaped what they had sown.

> "*Be not deceived, God is not mocked, Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,"* (Galatians 6:7)

Queen Mary soon died, and the English people rejoiced and celebrated her death. Church bells rang all over England. She is remembered as "Bloody Mary." Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry and Anne Boleyn, now became the Queen of England.

VI. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

Both Henry VIII and Bloody Mary were responsible for the death of a number of evangelical preachers. The last messages of those martyred provided a powerful

testimony of faith. For example, near the end of his life, Tyndale (executed by Henry VIII for translating the Scriptures) wrote:

> "Oh! What a happy thing it is to suffer for righteousness' sake. If I am afflicted on earth with Christ, I have joy in the hope that I shall be glorified with Him in heaven. Trials are a most wholesome medicine, and I will endue them with patience. My enemies destine me for the stake, but I am as innocent as a new-born child of the crimes of which they accuse me. My God will not forsake me. O Christ, Thy blood saves me, as if it had been mine own that was shed upon the cross. God, as great as He is, is mine with all that He hath. There is none other way into the kingdom of life than through persecution and suffering of pain and of very death, after the example of Christ."

Tyndale's last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Many people have speculated what the Lord may have done with that prayer. There are several possibilities, all of which may have been an answer to this prayer: Of first consideration, the king that Tyndale was praying for, Henry VIII, did, at the end of his life, profess faith in Christ. Henry had also eventually authorized a translation of the Bible and then printed it. Although the translation was given a different name, it was substantially Tyndale's Bible. In other words, the very Bible that brought Henry to have Tyndale burnt at the stake, Henry would eventually authorize and have distributed to the English people. Another possible answer to that prayer is that the next king of England was Edward, a man who had faith in Christ.

Some people have thought that King James I may have been the answer to this prayer because he was the first monarch in the history of the world to authorize a Bible in the vernacular and to put his stamp of approval on it. During that period of time, there were certain Bibles which were legal to print but still brought persecution from the local bishops and priests. Once King James authorized a Bible and secured that authorization with his own name, no one would dare persecute the use of that Bible. This brought the average person freedom to read the Bible in England without fear of persecution.

It if difficult to image what things were like before that; people would have Bibles but could not let others know they owned them. They could only show those whom they

could really trust. One story written fro that period of time tells of a family that was accused of owning a Bible. The family was executed, but no Bible was found. The next family to live in the house, however, eventually found the Bible. This family secretly read it but kept it hidden, because they knew that they, too, would be executed for this possession. Such fear was ended with King James. Another story from that period of time tells of a bishop who was teaching that people should not read the Bible. After the King James Bible came out, a bishop began to complain that the baker was openly reading the Bible in his bakery and the butcher had a Bible sitting out in his butcher shop for people to read while their orders were being prepared. This bishop complained that everywhere he went there was a Bible! Some people, though, believed that was the answer to Tyndale's prayer.

Very possibly, all of these were the answer to Tyndale's prayer. As God heard that prayer from someone who was about to be burned at the stake, "Lord open the King of England's eyes", the eyes of the king of England, at various times, in various kings, in various ways, were opened.

Another recorded testimony was that of Thomas Bilney. While burning at the stake for preaching salvation by faith, Bilney shouted, "Jesus, I believe!" openly maintaining his faith even during his death.

John Tewksbury, while stretched on a torture rack cried, "Christ alone" several times before death. By this, he gave testimony that his salvation was based on Christ alone; not church membership, not works, not the authority of the Catholic Church, and not the authority of the Church of England. He was trusting Christ alone. Many Christians today use this phrase to illustrate a similar stand, "Grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone."

John Nicholson cried "None but Jesus Christ," as he was being burned at the stake. There were many testimonies like these. One of the things these people wrote about constantly was how God gave them grace and strength in such moments. Because of this, their testimonies made a great impression upon the English people.

The English Reformation broke the power of Roman Catholicism in Europe. Germany was the first in attempting to break free of Roman Catholic power but it lacked strength because Germany had no common army. Scandinavian countries were thoroughly Protestant but did not have prominent military forces. Switzerland had become Protestant but was never a military power. However, when England defied Roman Catholicism, the English army and navy brought strength to that defiance. Throughout Europe, Protestants turned to England for help because England was clearly the greatest power that had turned to Protestantism. German Protestant states being threatened by German Catholic states appealed to England. Holland appealed to England when threatened by the Spanish, etc. England would respond, sometimes in small ways and other times in significant ways. Regardless, England became the real breaking point of Catholic power in Europe.

The English reformation also played a major role in preserving the pure Word of God for the world. Even during this period of time and written about by the people of this time, there was a debate regarding two different families of Bible manuscripts. The existence, though, of these two separate families of manuscripts was never under debate. The only debate was about which to accept. Protestants of the Reformation had a clear grasp of this issue and were not blinded by allegiance to the Bible manuscripts revered by the Catholic Church. Slightly prior to the translation of the King James Version, the Catholic Church issued its own Bible in English. While they had previously opposed English translations, such translations were having an obvious impact on people. This promoted the Catholic Church to develop its own translation, generating the production of the Rheims Douay Bible. This version was dramatically different than the Tyndale had been or the King James would be. The King James translation was further translated directly into 790 different languages. This Bible would be spread around the world preserving the pure Word of God, and have a greater impact than any other translation. Whether for it or against it, whether respected and revered or not, no one can argue the importance and impact that it has had.

The preaching of the gospel throughout the world was greatly enhanced by the English Reformation. English colonies brought the Gospel message to America and it was from England and America that the modern missions movement was developed. People all around the world, living in nations with no Judeo-Christian heritage, are being saved because of the work of American missionaries from the modern mission age. The English Reformation was largely responsible for the Gospel coming to America and, from these two nations, spread around the world.

This, of course, does not mean that everything which happened in the course of the English Reformation was good. The English Reformers did not, in the beginning, grant any religious liberty. In fact independent believers were put to death. It was not until 1612 that King James ended this practice. As he watched two Baptists burn at the stake, King James was horrified and said that he would never again allow that to happen. Many independent believers continued, however, to be persecuted, fined, and imprisoned. The English Reformation was in no way perfect. But the fact that the English Reformation broke the power of Catholicism and made it possible for the Gospel to spread around the world was of tremendous value.