

Lesson 4

THE REFORMATION PERIOD

A.D. 1300 - 1700

“So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.”’ (Jeremiah 18:11)

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. The Study of History is Profitable.

1. Old Testament writers appealed to history (Deut. 1-3; Psa. 78; Isa. 51:1-2).
2. Jesus (Mt. 12:40-42), Paul (1 Cor. 10:1-12), the author of Hebrews (Heb. 4:1-11), James (Jas. 5:17-18), Peter (2 Pet. 2:4-9; 3:3-5), and Jude (Jude 5-7) all appealed to history to make their point.
3. We follow their example and appeal to history to learn important lessons for the Lord’s church today.
4. It has been said: “Those who ignore history are destined to repeat it.” It has also been said: “All we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”

B. Why This Particular Study Is Profitable.

1. We find that many people (including those among the Catholic “clergy and laity”) were dissatisfied and disgruntled with the Catholic Church and attempted to reform it. Many living in and out of Rome felt that the Catholic Church was financially worldly and politically weak.
2. We will learn that in an attempt to reform the Catholic Church many substituted their own man-made doctrines and practice in place of those of the Catholic Church. Several man-made churches (denominations) were substituted for one man-made Catholic Church. Denominational heads (like the King of England over the Church of England) were substituted for the Pope. The men of the reformation were well-intentioned, but they were human and subject to mistakes.
3. We will learn that in an attempt to reform the Catholic Church many went from one extreme (salvation by works in the Catholic Church) to another extreme (salvation by faith alone in the Protestant Churches).
4. We will learn the great sacrifices that were made to undertake a reformation of religion.

C. Understanding Some Terms.

1. The “Renaissance” (1350 – 1550), meaning “new birth or revival,” began in Florence, Italy. It brought about a renewed interested in learning through universities and the printing press. It was also called the “Age of Enlightenment” and was a revolt against the monastic asceticism of the Dark Ages which stifled classical learning among the common people. The “humanist movement” was another name for this period because of the emphasis on classical “humanities” (history, poetry, philosophy). Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, and Roger Bacon were well-known men of the Renaissance.

2. The “Protestant” movement (1500’s and 1600’s) came from individuals within the Catholic Church (former priests, etc.) “protesting” the errors and abuses of the Catholic Church. The term was first used c. 1529.
3. The “Reformation” was not an “overthrow,” but a “reforming” of an existing order (the Catholic Church) enough to correct its errors and abuses. In particular, the Catholic Church needed changing in its Papal system of power, its doctrines (Papal succession from Peter, veneration of saints and Mariolatry, the seven sacraments [baptism, confirmation, penance, Eucharist, holy orders, marriage, extreme unction] and purgatory), its morals (the corrupt Papal system, the corrupt monasteries, simony), the way it handled punishment of its opponents (the Inquisition), and the selling of indulgences (pieces of paper sold for past and future sins used to finance the building of St. Peter’s Cathedral and the Catholic hierarchy).

II. THE CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH (WEST).

A. Pope Clement V (1305 – 1314).

1. He moved the center of the church from Rome to Avignon in 1309.
2. He suppressed the order of the Knights of the Templar and took their wealth.
3. The poet, Francisco Petrarch (104 – 1374), described this period as the “Babylonian Period” of the church.

B. Pope John XXII (1316 – 1334).

1. He built up Avignon to be a center of wealth and learning making it home to many artists and scholars who would later become founders of the humanist movement known as the Renaissance.
2. He dissolved the Spiritual branch of the Franciscans in 1317 and 1322, and he declared it heretical to claim that Christ lived in absolute poverty.
3. He condemned in 1327 a book written by Marsiglio titled, *Defender of the Peace*, which taught that the state had earthly power over the people, not the pope.

C. Pope Gregory XI (1370 – 1378).

1. He condemned the reforms of John Wycliffe (1329 – 1384), a priest and theologian who argued against papal power (see Wycliffe’s *On Civil Dominion*) and church institutions and who translated the Bible from Latin into English.
2. He returned the papacy to Rome in 1377.

III. THE GREAT SCHISM (WEST).

A. Pope Urban VI (1378 – 1389).

1. He ruled in Rome, but the French members of the College of Cardinals questioned the validity of Urban’s election. His rule was recognized by the Germans, English, Hungarians, Scandinavians, and Italians.

B. Pope Clement VII (1378 – 1394).

1. He was selected by the French members of the College of Cardinals and he ruled back in Avignon. His rule was recognized by the French, Naples, Naples, Scotland, Spain, and Sicily.

C. Pope Alexander V (1409).

1. He was selected by the cardinals of the Council of Pisa to be pope, thus establishing a third line of popes and making the schism worse.

D. Pope Martin (1417 – 1431).

1. He was selected by the Council of Constance in 1417 to be the pope to unite the Catholic Church in Rome, re-establish control over the papal states, and end the great schism.

IV. THE ORTHODOX CHURCH (EAST).

A. Outer Turmoil and Inner Peace.

1. The Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox Church struggled at this time. Constantinople was threatened in the East with the Slavic kingdoms and in the South with Islamic armies of the Ottoman Turks.
2. Members of the Orthodox Church began to focus on inner peace through meditation and mysticism. Monks at Mount Athos practiced “hesychasm” (quietness) which involved the repetition of the “Jesus Prayer” and strict body posture and breathing. The practices of the Hesychasts were upheld and defended by the Council of Constantinople (1341, 1347, and 1351).

B. Orthodox Growth.

1. Moscow became the seat of Russian Orthodoxy in 1328. Sergius founded a Russian monastery in 1350 and in 1380, helped defeat the Mongols and liberate the Russian church from Mongolian rule.
2. Orthodox Christianity came to Lithuania in 1386.

C. The Great Captivity.

1. In 1422, Ottoman Turks laid siege to the city of Constantinople.
2. In 1438 to 1445, members of the Western and Eastern churches were some unified by the Council of Florence.
3. In 1453, Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople. Turkish rule spread to the Balkans, Moldavia, Greece, Serbia and Poland. In 1517, Ottomans control Mecca and Jerusalem.
4. The Muslim rule of Constantinople and the Eastern church is known as the “Great Captivity”. The concordat reached between Ottoman rulers and the Orthodox Church would govern the people until 1923.
5. The Russian Orthodox Church began to separate from the Orthodox Church in 1448. Moscow, under the control of Ivan “the Great” (1462 – 1505), would be known as the “third Rome” and would rise to prominence.

V. THE SPANISH INQUISITION AND WITCH TRIALS.

A. The Inquisitor General.

1. An inquisition in Spain came through papal bulls issued by Pope Sixtus IV (1471 – 1484). Secular authorities appointed the examiners and conducted the trials of the alleged heretics.
2. Thousands of heretics, Moors, and Marranos were interrogated and executed by the Inquisitor General, Tomas de Torquemada.
3. In 1492, all unconverted Jews were expelled from Spain while Christopher Columbus was discovering the New World of the Americas. In 1494, Christianity came to the New World.

B. Witch Trials.

1. Fear of sorcery was a constant feature of both Catholicism and Protestantism. The Catholic Church required death for practitioners of black magic (1532).

2. In 1541, Luther approves of the burning of four witches in Wittenberg. In 1550 – 1560, courts in Geneva try 90 witches. In the 1580's, England, France, Germany, and Sweden experience a surge in witch trials.

VI. THE REFORMATION.

A. The Preparation for Reformation.

1. The break (schism) between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church which came in 1054.
2. The Papal power system of the Middle Ages had started to weaken during the papacy of Boniface VIII (1294 – 1303).
3. The Crusaders brought back new ideas to Europe from the Eastern world.
4. The development of cities lead to an interest in specialized labor and intellectual pursuits and replaced the monasteries.
5. The increase in exploration, trade, and discovery all lead to learning. The renewal of science and industry did the same.
6. A new idea that it was fine to engage in the learning of the world. The ascetic idea was weakening.
7. There was an awakening in Europe to literature and learning. People exchanged the darkness of ignorance for light of truth and there was a renewed interest in reading and studying the scriptures. Great works of art and literature were produced. Universities were built and filled with “scholastics” (see Lesson 4).
8. The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1455 helped to circulate printed copies of the scriptures. The first Polyglot Bible (Hebrew, Greek, Latin) published in 1514 in Alcalá, Spain, also paved the way for serious study of the Old and New Testaments.
9. The spirit of nationalism and patriotism in national states caused many to reject the suppressive power of the Catholic Church over them from a pope who lived in Rome.

B. The Beginnings of Reformation.

1. When men began to be discontent with the problems presented by the Catholic Church, they turned to reformation. We have already noticed the Albigenses and the Waldensians of 1170 (see Lesson 3). Some historians call these men “Protestants before the Reformation” or “Reformers before the Reformation.”
2. John Wycliffe (1324 – 1384) was an Englishman and graduate of Oxford University. Some call him the “Morningstar of the Reformation” because he was an early opponent of Catholicism (the authority of the pope, transubstantiation, priestly confession). His followers, the Lollards (mumblers), believed church practices should be drawn from scripture, not from church hierarchal systems.
3. John Huss (1369 – 1415) lived in Bohemia, taught at the University of Prague, and was a disciple of John Wycliffe. He opposed Catholicism (human tradition, tyranny of the clergy, indulgences) and was tried as heretic, called a “Wycliffite”, and burned to death in July, 1415. Jerome of Prague carried on his cause. Followers of Huss, the Hussites, were persecuted by the Catholic Church in a number “crusades” against the Czechs from 1420 to 1434.
4. John Wessel (1420 – 1498) opposed Catholicism.
5. Jerome Savonarola (1452 – 1498) opposed Catholicism in Italy (the authority of the pope, immorality of the clergy) and was arrested, put in prison, and burned to death on May 23, 1498.

6. Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536) attacked the Catholic Church for losing its spiritual way in *The Praise of Folly*. His Greek New Testament helped Bible students learn the original text for themselves.

C. The Catholic Counter-Reformation.

1. Catholics attempted to reform their own church from time-to-time and spread Catholicism. Members of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512 to 1517) met to reform clerical training and criticized the papacy for its over-involvement in temporal matters. But, their call for reform was ineffective.
2. The Catholic Counter-Reformation was a movement within the Catholic Church to reform itself. The Society of Jesus (1540) or Jesuits was a new monastic order and were governed by *Constitutions* of Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556). The Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) also came from this counter-reformation and solidified and strengthened Catholicism. This council ruled that the Catholic Church had sole authority to interpret the Bible and it upheld the practices of transubstantiation and the Mass. In 1568, the Hail Mary was introduced as well as a renewed devotion to the Virgin Mary.
3. Catholic Christianity also saw a revival of missionary work at this time. Missions were established in the New World (1500 - 1566), India (1542), Japan (1549), and China (1582). Catholics expanded their missions in the 1600's to Japan, China, India, South America (Paraguay, Colombia, Venezuela, the Spanish Caribbean, Buenos Aires, the Amazon), and North America (Nova Scotia, Canada, Santa Fe New Mexico)
4. Francis de Sales (1567 – 1622) was a counter-reformation missionary sent to Swiss Calvinists in 1599. Bishop Jansen (1585 – 1638) formed the Jansenist movement and attacked Protestantism in France.
5. Catholics gained ground in Poland (1569), the Ukraine (1694), and Transylvania (1691 – 1698). The practice of the Sacred Heart of Mary was formed by John Eudes (1601 – 1680) and Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647 – 1690).

D. The Formal Protestant Reformation.

1. The German Reformation.

- a) Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) led the way in Germany to oppose the Catholic Church's selling of indulgences. Luther was a German priest and theologian. John Tetzel (1465 – 1519), a German friar, was employed to preach the indulgence. The money from the sale of indulgences was used to pay off Catholic debts to finish building St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. Tetzel promised anyone that the indulgence would provide absolution for any crime and would instantly free dead loved-ones from the pain of the afterlife: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs." In October, 1517, Luther nailed 95 "theses" or propositions to the door of the Wittenberg Church opposing the Catholic Church and the selling of indulgences. He debated John Eck publicly on the matter in 1519. He also described the Catholic Church in a tract called "The Babylonian Captivity." He died in 1546 after being excommunicated by the Pope Leo X at the Diet of Worms (1521).
- b) One of Luther's mistakes was that he wanted to hold onto Catholic practices that were not expressly forbidden in scripture. The other mistake was his emphasis on salvation by faith alone (opposed to the Catholic salvation by works apart from faith).
- c) Luther's followers were declared heretics, but his successor, Melancthon, carried on Luther's cause in Germany. The German Lutheran Philip Jakob Spener (1635 – 1705) encouraged Lutheran piety in the form of personal Bible

study, fervent devotion, and the avoidance of religious and political struggles. The movement of “pietism” arose from Spencer’s teachings.

2. The Swiss Reformation.

- a) Ulrich Zwingli (1484 – 1564), writing under the influence of Erasmus, opposed the Catholic Church and wanted to abolish anything that could not be proved by scripture. He actually fought against the Christian Union of Catholics in 1529 and was killed in battle. In 1536, leadership of the Swiss Reformation pass to John Calvin (1509 – 1564). Calvin came from France and became Zwingli’s successor as a reformer in Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin systematized his teaching in his Institutes of Christian Religion (1536 – 1559). The Five Points of Calvinism or “TULIP” (Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints) would become the basis of Calvin’s teaching on the subject of salvation.
- b) John Knox took the teachings of Calvin to Scotland and started the Presbyterian Scottish Church in 1692. The Huguenots were French Calvinists who formed a church in Paris in 1559. They were attacked by Catholic troops in Paris on August 23-26, 1572. Over 5,000 Parisian Protestants were killed. The majority of Protestants in Europe who were not Lutherans were Calvinists. The English Puritans were Calvinists and the Netherlands adopted Calvinism as the state religion in 1622.
- c) Another principle teaching of Calvin was the doctrine of predestination where only the “elect” will be saved and all others are predestined to damnation. This doctrine would assume greater importance under the influence of the theologian Theodore Beza (1519 – 1605).
- d) Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609), a student of Beza, would argue against Calvin’s doctrine of predestination and determinism in the university and legal courts of Holland. Followers of Arminius published *Remonstrance* (1610) after his death which detailed the major divergence from Calvinism, namely that Christ died for all mankind and thus it is possible for all to be saved if they freely choose to believe.
- e) The Synod of Dort (1618 – 1619) convened to discuss the major points of Calvinism and Arminianism. The Synod ruled in favor of Calvinism and found *Remonstrance* and Arminianism to be unorthodox. Over 200 Arminian leaders were ousted from the country. However, men like John Wesley and the Methodists would be influenced later by Arminianism in the next century.

3. The English Reformation.

- a) William Tyndale (1484 – 1536) lead the way in England to oppose the Catholic Church and translated the New Testament into English so the common people could read the scriptures. He died after being tortured at the stake in 1536.
- b) Without Rome’s permission, Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury annuls King Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon (1533).
- c) In 1534, the Act of Supremacy establishes King Henry VIII as head of the Church of England. In 1536 – 1540, there is dissolution of Catholic monasteries in England. In 1552, the *Book of Common Prayer* abolishes the Mass, prayers for the dead, and Latin liturgy.
- d) The Catholic Mary I (1553 – 1558) assumes the English throne and English reformers are deported or imprisoned. She is known as “bloody Mary”. In 1558, however, the tables are turned and Queen Elizabeth I (1558 – 1603) restores Protestant reforms and persecutes English Catholics. King James VI continued Protestant reforms (the Church of England or Anglican Church) and

commissioned the translation of the “King James Version” of the Bible in 1611 which would allow more English-speaking peoples to read the Bible for themselves.

- e) The Anglican movement was not as popular under the rule of King Charles I (a Catholic sympathizer) or Oliver Cromwell (a Puritan). In 1660, King Charles II (another Catholic sympathizer), converted to Puritanism and started a movement known as “Restoration” to promote Puritanism in England. However, the 1662 Act of Uniformity restored Anglican movement once again to England. Those who refused to comply (English Presbyterians, Quakers, Congregationalists, Baptists and later, Methodists) were called “nonconformists”.

4. Other Reforms.

- a) The Anabaptists wanted to re-baptize those in the Catholic Church who had been baptized as infants and return to the New Testament. Out of this group came the Mennonites (Simon Menno) and the Baptist Church (John Smythe).
- b) The Socinians (Faustus and Leo Socini) rejected teachings of the Catholic Church and wanted to return to the New Testament, but they also denied the Trinity and the eternal hell which lead to the formation of the Unitarian Church.
- c) Some reforms took place in Constantinople (the Eastern Orthodox Church) and in Moscow (the Russian Orthodox Church). In 1629, Cyril Lucar set out to reform the Orthodox Church in the East by publishing his Calvinist *Confession of Faith*. But, Lucar’s Calvinist teachings were later condemned in Constantinople at the Synod of Jassy (1642) and in Jerusalem at the Synod of Jerusalem (1672). In Moscow, the Tsar Alexis a monk named Nikon, attempted to correct various corruptions in the Russian Orthodox Church (1666). Those who refused these reforms were called the “Old Believers”.

5. Wars of Religion.

- a) The Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648) took place in Prague when Protestant Bohemians rebelled against the Holy Roman Emperor. The fighting between Protestants and Catholics would spread to Holland, Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany, and Spain.
- b) The Treaty of Westphalia brought an end to the Thirty Years War in 1648. The treaty endorsed the policy *cuius regio eius religio*: the subjects of each nation should follow the religion of their ruler.

6. Protestant Churches of the Reformation.

- a) The Lutheran Church was founded by Martin Luther in Germany in 1521. It follows the *Book of Concord*, *Luther’s Catechism*, the *Smalcald Articles*, and the *Augsburg Confession of Faith*.
- b) The Episcopal Church or Anglican Church was founded by King Henry VIII in England in 1534. It follows Thomas Cranmer’s *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church* and the *Nicene Creed*. The Puritan movement was a Calvinist Reformation within the Anglican Church.
- c) The Congregational Church was founded by Robert Browne in England in 1550. They were originally a part of the Puritans. Many of the Pilgrim Fathers who came to America in 1620 were Congregationalists.
- d) The Presbyterian Church was founded by John Calvin in Switzerland in 1560. It follows the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Book of Common Prayer*.

- e) The Baptist Church was founded by the separatist Puritan John Smythe in Holland in 1609 (“Baptist” as a name was first used around 1644). They promoted believers baptism in opposition to infant baptism. They follow the *Baptist Manuel*.
- f) The Quakers (Religious Society of Friends) was founded by George Fox in 1647. They were originally a part of the Puritans.
- g) The Methodist Church was founded by John and Charles Wesley in England in 1739 (note that the Methodist Church came about as a reformation of the Church of England which itself came about as a reformation of the Catholic Church). It follows the *Methodist Discipline*.

VII.LESSONS LEARNED.

- A. Reading the Scriptures For Yourself Will Lead You Out of Ignorance and Error (Jn. 8:32; 17:17; Eph. 5:17).
- B. The Need for Restoration, Not Merely Reformation.
 - 1. The men of this period did not set out to restore true NT Christianity, but rather to reform the existing system of religion (Catholicism) by attempting to correct undesirable features of that religion.
 - 2. New religious denominations were formed as each man directed his efforts toward reforming a particular error or set of errors. Soon, denominations formed and later other denominations formed from them until thousands of religious denominations exist today. (Lesson 5 will touch on the founders and dates of some of these denominations).
- C. Reformation Leaders Taught Erroneous Doctrines.
 - 1. Luther’s demand for what is forbidden in scripture: “Thou shall not...” (compare with Col. 3:17; 2 Jn. 9). Luther’s salvation by faith alone (compare with Jas. 2:24-26).
 - 2. Calvin’s doctrine of TULIP (compare with Ezek. 18:20; Eph. 1:3-6; 1 Tim. 3:6; Acts 7:51; Gal. 5:4).

VIII.CONCLUSION.

- A. Let Us Not Simply Reform Abuses in Religion, But Go All the Way Back and Restore the New Testament Church (Lk. 8:11; Acts 11:26; Eph. 4:4-6).
- B. Let Us Not Leave One Man-Made Church to Form Another Man-Made Church (Mt. 15:13).
- C. Let Us Be the Faithful Remnant of the Lord’s Church.
 - 1. The Lord has always had a remnant of people who remain faithful to him during any period of history (1 Kings 19:18; Dan. 2:44; 1 Cor. 15:24; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:10,14).
 - 2. Will you be a part of that faithful remnant?