

Huss and Jerome

Lightbearers in Bohemia



LIGHTERS OF THE REFORMATION

Book 2

In the middle of Europe is the country of the Czech Republic. A long time ago this land was called Bohemia.



John Huss was born in the country of Bohemia on July 6 in the year of 1373 AD. His parents were poor and his father died when he was very small. But his mother was a very godly woman and she took care of him.

When Huss was a young man and ready for the university in the city of Prague, his mother went with him to the city. On the road to the city, his mother knelt with him and prayed. She

was poor and had no money to give her son. But she prayed for God to be with Huss. And God answered her prayers.

At the university Huss learned very fast. He was very smart. But he was also very kind. He was also a very strong believer in the Roman Catholic Church, but that would soon change.

Unlike many of the other countries in Europe, Bohemia had a Bible that had been translated into the people's language several hundred years before the time of Huss. There were also small groups of people who believed the gospel in many places all over Bohemia. But they had to worship in secret places because they would be thrown in jail or killed if they were found.

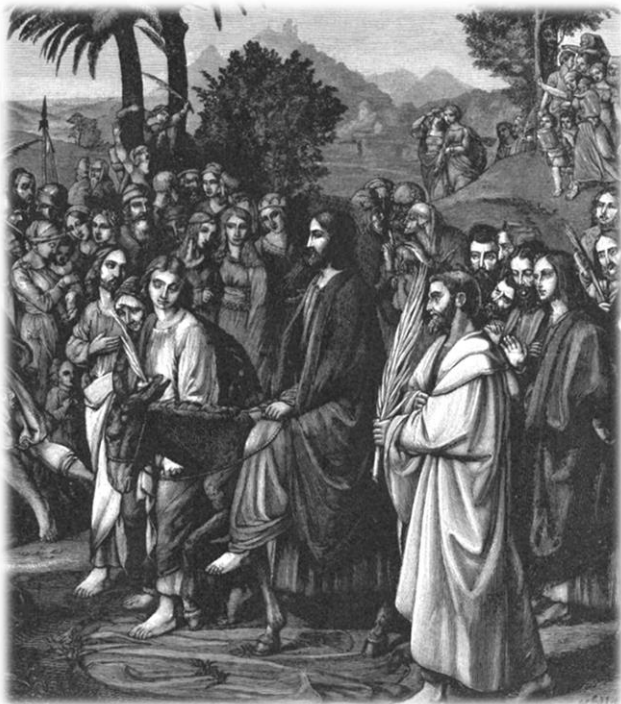
After finishing school at the university Huss became a priest. Soon he was working for the queen of Bohemia. He also became a teacher and was put in charge of the university. In just a few years people all over Bohemia and in other countries knew about Huss.

After several years Huss was put in charge of a church which was named Bethlehem. The man who had started this church believed that the preaching in the church should be done in the language the people spoke which was Bohemian. The Roman Catholic Church taught that the preaching should be in Latin which the people could not understand. Even though the Catholic Church said the preaching should be in Latin the church of Bethlehem still did the preaching in Bohemian. So Huss preached to the people in Bohemian.

But even though the people at the church of Bethlehem were taught in a language they understood, they still did not really know a lot about the Bible. And so many of the people lived very wicked, sinful lives. Huss began trying to teach the people to have better lives. He used the Bible to teach them how to live like God wanted them to live. To Huss, the Bible was more important than what men said. Because he believed and taught from the Bible he made the Catholic Church very angry with him.

The queen of England believed in the teachings of Wycliffe. She was a princess from Bohemia. So because of her, Wycliffe's writings were spread all over Bohemia. Huss read the writings of Wycliffe. He believed Wycliffe was a good Christian. He began to accept some of the truths Wycliffe taught.

About this time two men came from England to preach the truth in Prague. They first began to preach about the evils of the pope. But they were quickly told they could not preach to the people. This did not make them give up. They were both artists and so they began to draw two pictures for the people to look at. These pictures preached a sermon since the two men could not preach anymore.



One picture was of Jesus riding on the donkey into Jerusalem. He was dressed in his poor traveling clothes and he was followed by his disciples in their poor clothing and bare feet.

The other picture was of the pope. He was riding proudly on his richly dressed horse, with his triple crown on his head.

He had on fancy clothing covered with gold. People followed



him with trumpets and lots of richly dressed priests were with him.

Many came to look at the pictures. The people saw the meaning. Jesus had been poor and humble (**Matthew 21:5**), while the pope, who claimed to be the servant of Jesus was rich and proud.

Huss saw the pictures. They made him think hard. He began to study the

Bible and the writings of Wycliffe more and more. He wasn't ready to teach everything that Wycliffe said but he did begin to preach more and more against the evils and pride of the Roman Catholic Church.

When the pope found out what Huss was teaching he ordered Huss to come to Rome. If Huss were to go to Rome he would be killed. The people of Bohemia didn't want him to be killed. So the king and queen and many of the leaders of the government asked the pope if someone else could go instead of Huss. The pope did not answer them. Instead he placed the city of Prague under something called *interdict*.

Interdict was scary for the people who did not know what the Bible taught. The pope said he could close heaven against people. If a city was

placed under interdict no one from that city could go to heaven. This wasn't true, but it scared the people.

Because of the interdict all the churches in Prague were closed. Many of the people in Prague were afraid of the interdict so they turned against Huss. For a short time Huss had to leave Prague and go live in the small town he had been born in. He also began traveling around the country of Bohemia sharing the truth in the small towns. So what the pope did to stop the gospel in Prague only spread the gospel all over Bohemia.

After things got better in Prague Huss went back to live in the city. Before this time he had worked alone but now a man named Jerome joined him in his work. Jerome had been in England where he had learned of the truths Wycliffe taught. Jerome had

many talents and was a great speaker. But even though he was very talented he was also very humble. He recognized that Huss knew more about the Bible and was a stronger Christian. And so he would listen and follow the advice of Huss.

The Roman Catholic Church was very divided. There were now three popes, each one claiming to be the one and only true pope. They fought with each other. This gave the people a bad example to follow and more and more evil things happened because the Roman Catholic Church wasn't following the Bible. Huss began to preach more and more boldly against these evils.

Again Prague was placed under interdict. Huss left Prague again to go live in his home town. He left Prague for the last time. His work at Prague

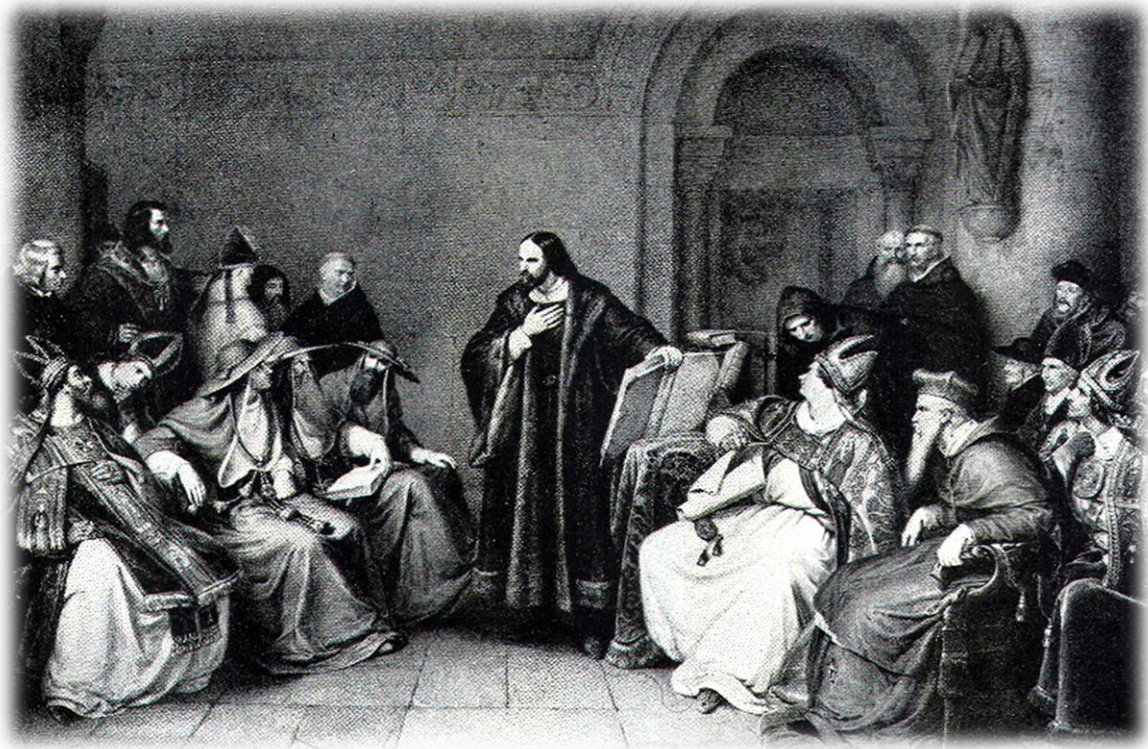
was ended. He would not again return to live and preach in his church at Prague.

One of the three popes called a council at the city of Constance. Huss was told to come to the council. Huss told his friends goodbye. He thought he would never see them again.

The Catholic **emperor**¹ whose name was Sigismund had given Huss a safe-conduct. The safe-conduct meant he would not be hurt when he came to the council. But Huss knew that wicked people cannot be trusted. Huss didn't trust men, he only trusted in God.

¹ An **emperor** is a man who rules over an **empire** which is many kingdoms joined together and ruled by one head ruler. Sigismund ruled over the Holy Roman Empire which included the lands of Germany, Italy, and Bohemia.

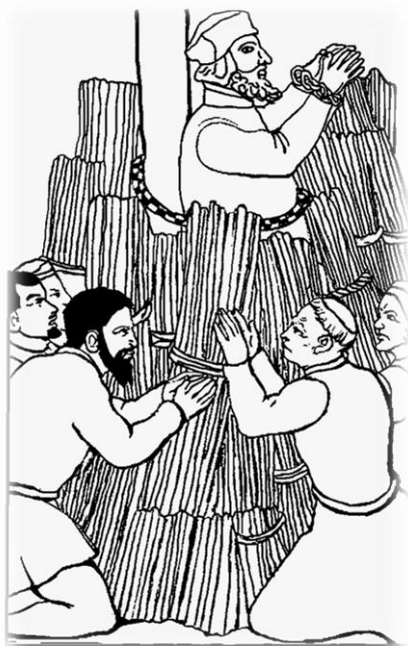
As Huss traveled to the city of Constance he saw that his teachings had spread all over the country. Everywhere people came to see him as he traveled through their towns.



When Huss arrived at the city of Constance the pope also promised him that he would not be hurt. But despite these two promises, Huss was soon thrown into jail. When the people of Bohemia heard that Huss had been thrown in jail they became angry. But although many of the government

men from Bohemia tried to get him out of jail he was still kept in jail.

After a long time of being kept in the jail he was brought before the emperor. The cold and bad air in the jail had made Huss sick and weak but he stood strong for his faith. Huss was given a choice. He could give up his faith and say what he had been teaching was wrong or he must die by being burnt at the stake. Huss chose to die.



On his birthday in the year of 1415, Huss was taken to the stake to be burnt. When Huss had been tied to the stake and the wood piled around him, he was again asked for the last time to give up the truth he had taught. "No," said Huss, "I never

preached anything evil. And what I taught with my lips I now seal with my blood."

As the fire began to burn around him, he began to sing, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," and he continued singing until he died.

When Huss was thrown in prison, his friend Jerome came to Constance to help get him out of jail. But Jerome could not do anything to help Huss. Jerome was caught and also thrown in jail. Jerome was kept in jail for a whole year.

Jerome became so weak from the lack of good food and water that he got very sick. His enemies did not want him to die yet. They wanted him to give up his faith. So after his sickness he was treated a little better but he still remained very weak.

The death of Huss had not made the men at the council of Constance happy. Many people were angry with them for killing Huss when he had been promised safe-conduct. So the council decided it would be better if they could get Jerome to give up the truth rather than killing him.

Jerome was called in. He was given the same choice as Huss. He must give up the truths they had taught or die at the stake. But Jerome had been weakened by the long time in jail and the sickness. He had no friends near to support him. And he was also very sad that his friend Huss had been killed.

Because of all of these things, Jerome chose to give up the truth. He agreed to follow the teachings of the Catholic Church. He agreed to say that the teachings of Wycliffe and Huss had

been mostly wrong. He hoped that this would save his life.

But when he was taken back to the jail he had time to think about what he had done. He knew he would have to take back even more things before he would be set free. He thought about Huss and how strongly he had stood for the truth. He thought about Jesus who had given His life on the cross to save men. He felt sorry for giving up the truth and determined that he would again stand for the truth, even if he also had to die.

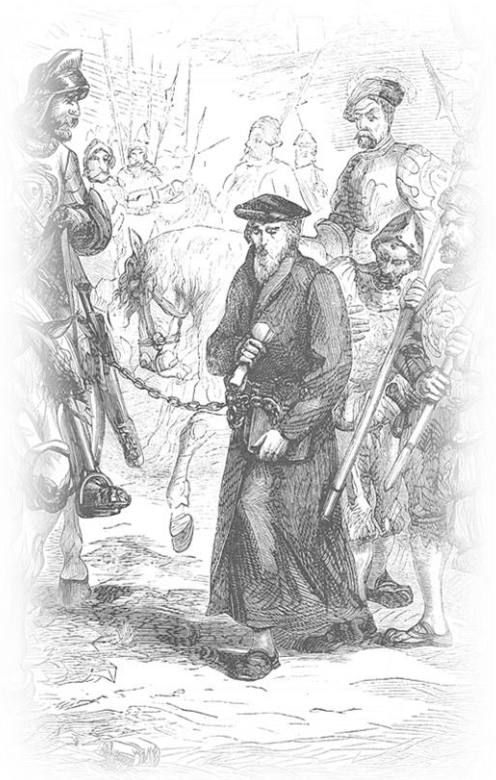
Soon he was brought again before the council and asked to give up everything. But now Jerome stood firm. He said he had been wrong in giving up the first time. Now he would stand. He asked for some time to speak. He then knelt down and asked for the Holy Spirit to control his thoughts and

give him the right words. After his prayer he spoke so clearly that it surprised his hearers.

Later as someone again tried to get him to give up his faith, Jerome said firmly, "Prove to me from the Bible that I am wrong, and I will take back what I have said."

It was not very long and the council decided Jerome would have to die too since he would not give up the truth. As he was led to the same spot where Huss had died he sang songs about Jesus.

Jerome's last words before the fire burnt him were a prayer. "Lord, Almighty Father," he prayed, "have pity on me, and forgive



my sins; for You know that I have always loved Thy truth."

Both Huss and Jerome were dead, but the work of reform they had begun in Bohemia went on. Their deaths only helped the people see better how evil the Roman Catholic Church had become. The people wanted to learn more and so they began to study the Bible and the writings of Wycliffe and Huss. Many people learned the truth because of the deaths of Huss and Jerome.

The pope and the Catholic Church were not happy about the many people in Bohemia who were believing the truth that Huss and Jerome had taught. Those that believed the teachings of Huss were called the Hussites. The pope and the emperor sent many armies into Bohemia to destroy the Hussites. But even though

the armies were bigger and stronger than the Hussites they could not destroy them. God protected them in many ways. He raised up a brave general named Ziska to protect them. Even though Ziska became blind he was still a very wise general and with his leadership and God's help the Hussites won many battles.

At last not being able to win against the followers of Huss in battle, the pope and emperor tried to trick them to compromise. While pretending to give the Hussites freedom to follow the Bible, they made them agree to follow what the Catholic Church said. This caused the Hussites to split into two groups. Many followed what the church said again. But a small group of people followed the truth. This small group were forced to meet in secret places in the woods or caves to read

the word of God but they stayed true to God.

Nearly 100 years after the time of John Huss, another Reformer would continue the work of bringing the people out of the Dark Ages into the light of truth. But until that time the small group of Huss's followers in Bohemia continued to stay faithful to God. They waited for the day when the light of truth would bring an end to the darkness of error.

One day Jesus will come and take all His faithful people to heaven. He will raise the faithful dead people like Huss and Jerome and take them to heaven too. If you stay faithful to God you will be able to meet Huss and Jerome and the many other people who were faithful to God. Best of all you will get to see Jesus. Will you choose today to stay faithful to God?



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