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# THE PURITANS

THEIR  
HISTORY  
AND  
HEROICS

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# THE PURITANS: THEIR HISTORY AND HEROICS



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**ONEPASSION**

*For God. For His Glory. Forever.*



*The Puritans: Their History and Heroics*  
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JOHN KNOX ( C. 1513 – NOVEMBER 24, 1572)

# 1

## THE PURITAN ERA

**F**ew generations ever assembled on the stage of human history have been more devoted to living for the glory of God than the Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. J. I. Packer has labeled these titans of church history, “the California Redwoods in the forest of Christianity.” Deeply rooted and grounded in the Scripture, J. C. Ryle asserted that in power as preachers, expositors, and writers, “the Puritans in their day were second to none.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones boldly maintained that “all that is good in evangelicalism finds its roots in Puritanism.” With meticulous discipline, the Puritans took the robust theology of the Reformers and were resolved to live it out in every area of their Christian lives.

Strictly speaking, the Puritans were devout men and women within the Church of England at this time who sought to purify its doctrine and worship. More broadly speaking, it can be argued that the Puritan spirit also animated those Nonconformists outside the national English church who embraced the same core beliefs and implemented them with the same fervor, and this brief history assumes something of that breadth and continuity. Such believers were first given the nickname “Puritan” in the early 1560s as a term of derision due to their efforts to conform the national church in England to the standard

of Scripture - to purify it in faith and practice. Sound in doctrine and strong in their devotion, the Puritans distinguished themselves by their unwavering loyalty to the supreme authority of God's Word. They insisted that the beliefs and practices of the Anglican Church must yield to the higher sovereignty of biblical truth. As they followed in the footsteps of the Reformers, the Puritans became the new champions of sola Scriptura—Scripture alone.

## **JOHN KNOX: THE FIRST PURITAN?**

According to Martyn Lloyd-Jones, it is possible to see the Puritan era beginning with the noted Reformer, John Knox. In September 1552, this fiery Scot became a royal chaplain to King Edward VI and was charged with traveling throughout England to preach the word and spread the Protestant faith. By this commission, he frequently preached before the King at such notable places as Windsor Castle, Hampton Court, St. James's Palace, and Westminster Abbey. Lloyd-Jones notes that this assignment positioned Knox "right in the centre of affairs in England." Knox used this strategic placement to challenge the prescribed public worship within the Church of England, which he believed retained elements of Catholic influence. Knox believed that under the previous king, Henry VIII, the national church had not gone far enough in its separation from Rome.

One typical area of concern had to do with kneeling at communion as prescribed in the edition of The Book of Common Prayer issued in 1549. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, insisted that when taking communion, one should kneel before the bread and wine. Knox vehemently denounced this practice as resembling Catholicism and failing "to conform to Christ." This clash with Knox forced Cranmer to produce a Second Book of Common Prayer (1552) with an addition known as the Black Rubric which clarified that kneeling was not an act of worship toward the elements. William Blaikie writes that this bold attempt to purify the practices of the Church of England entitles Knox to be considered the "founder of Puritanism."

## **REIGNS OF TERROR AND TOLERANCE**

Tragic to the initial Puritan cause was the early death of King Edward VI in



EDWARD VI (OCTOBER 12, 1537 - JULY 6, 1553)

## KNOX BELIEVED THAT UNDER THE PREVIOUS KING, HENRY VIII, THE NATIONAL CHURCH HAD NOT GONE FAR ENOUGH IN ITS SEPARATION FROM ROME.

1553. This Protestant monarch died while yet a teenager. He was succeeded to the throne by his half-sister, Mary I, the only child of Henry VIII and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, to survive to adulthood. A staunch Catholic, Mary I sought to reverse the advances of her Reform-minded predecessor. Known as 'Bloody Mary,' she launched a reign of terror in which she burned at the stake some 288 believers with Puritan-like convictions. Under her intense persecution, many Protestants were driven out of England to find safety on the European continent. Numbers of exiles fled to Geneva, where they attended the English-speaking church pastored by John Knox. In this Swiss city of refuge, these Protestant Englishmen learned a distinctly God-centered Christianity where John Calvin was teaching the Scripture-regulated simplicity of Reformed worship.

Mary I died in 1558 and was replaced by her half sister, Elizabeth I. With a new queen on the throne, the Marian exiles returned to England and brought with them their hopes of continuing the changes that had began under Edward VI. These Protestant pastors, theologians, and laymen attempted to bring the Church of England into further conformity to Scripture. They diligently sought a more comprehensive reformation of church government and worship than had been previously implemented. In the early years of her reign, the English Puritan movement took a more visible form, though not completely so. Elizabeth I effectively established the Church of England as merely a compromise between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Her Acts of Uniformity in 1562-1569 left the church only "half reformed." Though sympathetic to Protestants, she refused to drop all Rome-like practices of worship in the Church of England.



HENRY VIII (JUNE 28, 1491 – JANUARY 28, 1547)



MARY I (FEBRUARY 18, 1516 – NOVEMBER 17, 1558)

## KING JAMES I CROWNED

During this time, Mary, Queen of Scots, abdicated the throne of Scotland after suffering multiple confrontations with Knox in Holyrood Palace, Edinburgh. Succeeding her to the throne was her infant son, James VI, who was crowned King of Scotland in 1567 at age thirteen months. The royal ceremony occurred at Stirling, Scotland, where Knox preached the service. Four different regents governed Scotland until King James came of age and took full control of the Scottish government in 1583.

In 1603, Elizabeth I died childless, ending the Tudor dynasty over England and Ireland. Her senior advisor, Robert Cecil, made successful arrangements for James VI of Scotland—the great-great grandson of Henry VII—to succeed her to the throne. At age thirty-seven, James VI of Scotland became James I over Scotland, England, and Ireland, the first monarch to reign over all three realms. Upon his ascension, the Puritans believed that James I, raised as a Calvinist, would bring the cause of the Reformation to a fuller realization in England. In 1603, the Puritan leaders met with the new king at Hampton Court Palace to present their requests in The Millenary Petition. This document is said to have contained the signatures of 1000 Puritan ministers and called for yet further reform in the church. But they were soon disappointed.



JAMES VI AND I (JUNE 19, 1566 – MARCH 27, 1625)

## 2

# BIBLES AND KINGS

**T**he advisors around James I counseled him to counter the teaching of the Geneva Bible with its marginal notes that - among other things considered objectionable - called for greater allegiance to God than to earthly kings. The solution was that James I launched his own Bible project, often called the Authorized Version—later known as the King James Version. Begun in 1604, the translation work was accomplished by forty-seven scholars, all members of the Church of England, and was completed in 1611. This new English translation was produced from the original languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek, and included the Apocrypha. The purpose was to replace the Geneva Bible with its Protestant study notes that were contradicting the teaching of the Church of England.

Seeking to expand his influence, James I attempted to impose the worship liturgy of the Church of England upon the Church of Scotland. The Five Articles of Perth were decreed in 1618, and required kneeling at the Lord's Supper as it was made compulsory in England. Further, it mandated private communion for the sick, infant baptism not later than one Sabbath after birth, episcopal confirmation, and the observance of holy days such as Christmas and Easter. These five articles were met with vigorous resistance by the Scots who

## MANY PURITANS WERE GROWING RESTLESS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO REFORM THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

held strong views on these matters. Nevertheless, the articles were reluctantly accepted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1618.

Many Puritans were growing restless in their efforts to reform the Church of England. A number chose to remove themselves from national English Church, and these Separatists journeyed to other lands in search of religious freedom. This included the Pilgrims, who first traveled to the Netherlands and then sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to America in 1620 to establish Plymouth Colony. Ten years later, in 1630, a larger group of 13,000 Puritans, led by John Robinson, immigrated to New England. These displaced sojourners had freedom for the first time to build churches and worship God without government interference. It should be noted that many were not necessarily in favor of a more absolute toleration, but rather the freedom to worship God in accordance with their own conscience, which itself sometimes led to the persecution of others. A host of noted Puritan preachers migrated from England to the New World, including John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and Thomas Shepard.

### **SUCCEEDED BY CHARLES I**

King James I died in 1625 and was succeeded by his second son, Charles I. This new monarch believed in the divine right of the king and immediately distanced himself from Parliament by levying taxes without its consent. He further angered the Puritans by marrying a devout Catholic, Henrietta Maria. Charles I then appointed William Laud to be Bishop of London in 1628, who imposed stricter policies in the public worship of the Church of England. Laud was made Archbishop of Canterbury over the other bishops of the Church of England in 1633. Believing the Calvinistic convictions of the



CHARLES I (NOVEMBER 19, 1600 – JANUARY 30, 1649)

Puritan movement to be a threat, Laud introduced more Catholic-like forms of worship to the national Church. He also tried to force this same liturgy and its Arminian theology upon the Church of Scotland.

When the new Anglican rituals were imposed upon the Scots, a market-trader named Jenny Geddes started a riot in St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh. When the head minister, James Hannay, was publicly reading the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, she picked up a stool in the sanctuary and threw it at him. This defiant action provoked a public display of outrage against this imposition by Charles I upon the Scottish people. Strongly Calvinistic, the Church of Scotland refused to worship in the manner required by King Charles I.

## **SCOTTISH NATIONAL COVENANT**

This Scottish resistance led to the signing of the National Covenant by a large gathering at Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh, on February 28, 1638. Copies of the document were sent out to the other cities of Scotland that were subsequently signed. Those who signed the National Covenant were known as Covenanters, who pledged to reject all human innovations in worship. This document asserted that the only head of the Church of Scotland was not the king of England but rather Jesus Christ. Moreover, this agreement rejected the “superstitions and papist rites” in the Book of Common Prayer and maintained they would worship exclusively as Scripture teaches. The Scottish Parliament later subscribed to the Covenant in 1640, making the law of the land.

King Charles I did not take this defiance lightly. This determined monarch responded by marching to the Scottish border with 20,000 soldiers in 1639 to suppress this rebellion. The Covenanters raised an army of 12,000 men to resist the king’s threatening advance, resulting in the conflicts known as the Bishops’ Wars. These military confrontations were so named because Charles I demanded an episcopal system of church government by which his archbishop would appoint bishops and they, in turn, would place ministers over the churches. However, Scotland affirmed a Presbyterian system of church government with local elders and presbyteries over the churches. In essence, the Bishops’ Wars were fought over the right of the king to dictate the church government and public worship of the Church of Scotland. Fighting broke out in the streets of Edinburgh and other Scottish cities between the Covenanters and Scottish royalists.



THE SIGNING OF THE NATIONAL COVENANT IN  
GREYFRIARS KIRKYARD, EDINBURGH  
(FEBRUARY 28, 1638)

Meeting strong Scottish fighting, Charles I accepted their truce offer, though the settlement proved to be short lived. A second Bishops' War followed in 1640 in which the invading Scots army soundly defeated the English forces of Charles I. The king agreed to pay the Scot's war expenses and not to impose his Anglican worship upon the Scottish church.

## **TROUBLE FOR THE KING**

On April 13, 1640, the impoverished monarch recalled Parliament in order to raise money to finance his losing military struggles in the Bishops' Wars. But rather than discuss imposing taxes to fund the king's failed quest for power, Parliament instead addressed their grievances with the Crown. In the face of their opposition, Charles I countered by dissolving Parliament with its many Puritan members on May 5, 1640. This governing body sat for only three weeks and was labeled the Short Parliament. On November 3, 1640, the king convened another Parliament for the purpose of paying his royal bills. This new Parliament sat from 1640 to 1648. It is known as the Long Parliament. They resolutely voted that they could not be dissolved except by their own determination. This emboldened stance provoked a prolonged warfare between the King and Parliament known as the English Civil Wars.

The English Civil Wars were a succession of extended conflicts concerning how the government of England and, therefore, the church would be run. When Parliament faced the threat of the Irish Catholic troops making an alliance to fight with Charles I, an agreement was reached between the English Parliament and the Scottish Covenanters in 1643 known as the Solemn League and Covenant. The Scottish Presbyterians promised their military support to Parliament against Ireland provided that the Scottish system of church government and worship would be adopted by Parliament. Under this forged alliance, the Scottish army captured Charles I in 1645, who, in turn, handed him over to the English Parliament.

## **THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY MEETS**

Keeping the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant, the Long Parliament—which was strongly Puritan—called for a council of Reformed theologians



THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES WAS  
A COUNCIL OF THEOLOGIAN AND MEMBERS  
OF THE ENGLISH PARLIAMENT APPOINTED TO  
RESTRUCTURE THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
WHICH MET FROM 1643 TO 1653

and their own members to meet in London to write documents to reform the Church of England from the policies of Charles I and Archbishop Laud. The intended purpose was to establish unity among the national churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland in their beliefs, worship, and polity. From 1643 to 1649, over one hundred Puritan leaders met in the Westminster Assembly, comprised mostly of English Presbyterians, also joined by Episcopalians, Congregationalists (also called Independents or known as the “dissenting brethren”), Erastians, and Scots Commissioners. This group of “divines” wrote five important documents to guide the church in its doctrine, worship, and practice. These standards were the Directory for Public Worship (1644), The Form of Presbyterian Church Government (1645), The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), The Larger Catechism (1647), and The Shorter Catechism (1647). Each document was decidedly Calvinistic, and the form of church government was Presbyterian.

When these standards were completed, the Church of Scotland immediately approved them in 1647. The next year, these Reformed statements of faith were adopted by Congregationalists in New England. In 1658, the English Congregationalists subscribed to The Savoy Declaration, an adaptation of the Westminster Confession with only slight changes made regarding church government. Later, many Particular Baptist congregations adopted The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1677/1689. This document deliberately demonstrated the common theological orthodoxy between these churches and the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, with particular adaptations made in such areas as church government and the ordinances. However, the Westminster Confession was never adopted in the Church of England.

During the Westminster Assembly, one of its Scottish members, Samuel Rutherford, wrote a landmark book, *Lex Rex*, in 1644. The title means ‘the Law the King,’ or the Law is King. Rutherford advocated that rather than the king being the law, the law, instead, is king. This work defends the rule of law in the nation and the right to engage in pre-emptive and defensive wars for the protection of innocent lives. This political treatise argued for limited government, constitutionalism, and restricted rights of the king. That same year, Parliament arrested Archbishop Laud, tried him for treason, and beheaded him on January 10, 1645.



THE ENGLISH CIVIL WARS

### 3

## THE COMMONWEALTH

In February 1648, the Second English Civil War broke out between King Charles I and the Parliamentarians. Once again, this involved more military conflicts between these two warring factions. Oliver Cromwell, a staunch man of Puritan conviction, was empowered to marshal the military forces of his New Model Army to capture England for the Parliamentarians. These soldiers first defeated a Royalist uprising in south Wales and then marched to confront a pro-Royalist faction from Scotland that had invaded England. Cromwell won a decisive victory at the Battle of Preston on August 17-19, 1648 against a Scottish army twice his size. A strong believer in divine sovereignty, Cromwell was confident that God was with him to defeat those who opposed the causes of the Lord. This triumph concluded this second phase of the English Civil Wars.

In January 1649, Charles I was put on trial by the Rump Parliament, the remaining remnant of the Long Parliament that had survived its purging by Colonel Thomas Pride. The king was found guilty of high treason as a “tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy” for prolonging the civil war. Charles I was publicly executed by decapitation in front of Whitehall London on January 30. The next day, John Owen preached before Parliament. Though he did



JOHN OWEN (1616 – AUGUST 24, 1683)

not mention explicitly the sober event of the previous day, the sermon is entirely of the moment. This noted Puritan theologian called for national humiliation in the face of such political upheaval.

## THE COMMONWEALTH ESTABLISHED

Rather than crown a new king, Parliament abolished the monarchy and declared the United Kingdom to be a Commonwealth. The Rump Parliament assumed executive and legislative powers, with Cromwell remaining as one of its members. The Royalist forces regrouped in Ireland and signed a treaty with the Irish Catholics to resist the English Parliament. In March 1649, the Rump Parliament chose Cromwell to lead a military campaign against the Irish that lasted nine months. In 1650, the Puritan leader was victorious against the opposition that supported a monarchy in Ireland. When pro-Royalist forces in Scotland proclaimed Charles II, the son of Charles I, to be their king, Cromwell advanced north to invade Scotland, where at the Battle of Dunbar, his army killed 4,000 Scottish soldiers, took 10,000 prisoners and captured Edinburgh. At the Battle of Worcester, on September 3, 1651, Cromwell's forces defeated the last major Royalist army in Scotland. In light of these triumphs, Charles II, the previous heir to the throne, fled into exile in France.

Upon Cromwell's return to England, he urged the Rump Parliament to set dates for new elections and to unite the three kingdoms—England, Scotland, and Ireland—under one governance. Cromwell became Chancellor of Oxford University in 1651 and appointed Owen Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford in 1652. Owen served for the next eight years and cast a strong Puritan influence over the institution. Cromwell, a Congregationalist, sought a broader, more tolerant national church that was sympathetic to Puritan ideals. He also demanded the Rump Parliament select a forty member governing body from its members and the military officers. When Parliament refused, Cromwell swiftly dissolved them on April 20, 1653, saying “You have sat too long for any good you have been doing lately...Depart, I say; and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!”



OLIVER CROMWELL (APRIL 25, 1599 – SEPTEMBER 3, 1658)

# RATHER THAN CROWN A NEW KING, PARLIAMENT ABOLISHED THE MONARCHY AND DECLARED THE UNITED KINGDOM TO BE A COMMONWEALTH.

## **CROMWELL, LORD PROTECTOR**

In this political struggle, England realized it needed a strong, central leader. In 1653, an interim Parliament—the Barebones Parliament—made Cromwell Lord Protector over the Commonwealth. This gave him the power to call and dissolve Parliament with the support of the council of State. As a Nonconformist, Cromwell sought to uphold the liberty of conscience in matters of worship and to promote personal godliness in the land. He encouraged Jews to come to England in order to hear the gospel and be converted. Their salvation, he believed, would hasten the return of Christ.

So effective was Cromwell as a leader that Parliament offered the crown to him in 1657. Puritan aspirations were at their zenith. When Cromwell sought counsel, several advisors, including the formidable Owen, urged him not to accept. Eventually, Cromwell declined the offer of the crown and continued as Lord Protector. Yet for all his leadership abilities, Cromwell could not establish a politically or religiously united and stable state. The many forces in the three kingdoms were too complex for such a solution. In 1658, Cromwell contracted malarial fever and died at age fifty-nine at Whitehall on September 3, 1658. Though a controversial figure, he was buried at Westminster Abbey.

Cromwell was succeeded as Lord Protector by his son Richard, who lacked the decisive leadership abilities of his father. The English governor of Scotland, George Monck, sensed weakness and led an army to march on London, whereby Richard lost his office after only nine months. Monck restored the Long Parliament and made the necessary constitutional changes so that Charles II could return to England and rule in a restored monarchy. Cromwell's son fled abroad and lived in obscurity for the rest of his life. By



CHARLES II (MAY 29, 1630 – FEBRUARY 6, 1685)

this setback, the Puritan hope suffered a devastating blow.

## **THE MONARCHY RESTORED**

In 1660, the monarchy was restored, and Charles II was retrieved from France to be made king over the United Kingdom. After initial conciliatory overtures to the Puritans, he was pressured by Loyalists to restore a more Catholic-like worship conformed to the Church of England. With the support of Parliament, several laws were put in place that were aimed at reversing the Puritan advances. Foremost among this legislation was the Clarendon Code, a series of four acts of Parliament intended to enforce religious conformity within the Church of England. These acts were the Corporation Act, the Act of Uniformity, the Conventicle Act, and the Five Mile Act. Other penal acts would also be established at this time.

Anti-Puritan feelings were now running high. On January 30, 1661, Cromwell's body was exhumed from Westminster Abbey, and his disinterred body was hanged in chains and then thrown into a pit. His skull was severed and mounted on a pole outside Westminster Hall, publicly displayed for the next twenty-four years. Many pastors and preachers of essentially Puritan convictions and sympathies, both within and without the national church, would be subjected to persecution and imprisonment, including such renowned figures as John Bunyan and Richard Baxter.

## **THE SEDITION AND CORPORATION ACTS**

First to be issued was the Sedition Act in 1661, which identified new acts of high treason against England. This legislation made seditious any attempt to deprive the king of his crown or to levy war against him. Further, it declared treasonous any incitement to a foreign army to invade England or other countries belonging to the king. Anyone who called the king a heretic or papist or who incited hatred against the king was regarded treasonous and disqualified from all public office. This act also declared the Solemn League and Covenant to be null and void.

Another anti-Puritan piece of legislation known as the Corporation Act was soon passed by Parliament in 1661. This act basically restricted public offices in England to those attached to the Church of England. No citizen could

be elected to a civil or public office unless he had received the Lord's Supper in the Church of England within the last twelve months. Moreover, all public officials must reject the Solemn League and Covenant. This legislation was intentionally aimed at excluding Nonconformists from holding civil or military office in English society. In addition, this act excluded all Nonconformists from being awarded degrees from the two English universities, Cambridge and Oxford.

## **THE ACT OF UNIFORMITY**

The following year, in 1662, yet another law was enacted by Parliament that mandated public prayers, the sacraments, and other rites be made in strict conformity with the Book of Common Prayer. Adherence was necessary to hold public office or to be lawfully ordained into the ministry. Puritan ministers were required to abandon their previous ordination and be re-ordained under this new regulation. If Protestant ministers were to be re-ordained in the Church of England, they must swear allegiance to the stipulations of the Book of Common Prayer. Any minister who refused to conform to these regulations by August 24, 1662, would be ejected from the Church of England.

As a result of this and other strictures, over 2,000 pastors—one fifth of all the clergy—were expelled from their pulpits. Many men of Puritan stamp refused to take the oath, and as a result, on this dreadful day, a vast number of godly ministers were turned out of the national church. The date was chosen to deprive them of their livings in such a way as to maximize their hardships. This specific date was also St. Bartholomew's Day, the date in 1572 on which thousands of Huguenots had been massacred by the Catholic-led government of France; it became known among Dissenters - those who would and could not conform and so now outside the Church of England - as Black Bartholomew's Day. Known as the Great Ejection, J. C. Ryle said that this event inflicted an "injury to the cause of true religion in England which will probably never be repaired."

## **CONVENTICLE AND FIVE MILE ACTS**

A subsequent act of Parliament, passed in 1664, was known as the Conventicle

Act. This law banned any church not officially licensed by the Crown from conducting a “conventicle,” from a Latin word meaning ‘a little meeting place.’ This restrictive act prohibited any religious assembly of more than five people who were not members of the same household. All religious assemblies outside the auspices of Church of England were strictly forbidden. The purpose was to suppress Puritans and their spiritual kin from gathering together for the preaching of the word and worshipping God as their beliefs directed them. It should be noted that, from this point, most Puritans were outside the Church of England and so no longer Puritans in the strictest sense. However, such believers remained motivated by the same desire for glory to God through obedience to his revealed will, and it is to this spirit that I refer in using the word ‘Puritan.’

The following year, in 1665, another act known as the Five Mile Act was passed. This law forbade Nonconformist clergymen from coming within five miles of an incorporated town or city large enough to have representation in Parliament. This legislation also restricted Puritan ministers from coming within five miles of their former church from which they had been expelled. Moreover, Nonconformist ministers were forbidden from teaching in any school. In addition, Nonconformists were required to take an oath not to take arms against the king. They also could not attempt to change the government or church polity. Consequently, many Nonconformists of the London area were forced to be buried outside the city limits as a sign of reproach. One such burial place was Bunhill Fields outside of London, where Dissenters of this and later years were buried - men such as John Bunyan, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Isaac Watts, John Gill and more.

## **GREAT PLAGUE, GREAT FIRE**

By the heavy hand of providence, two national disasters swiftly struck London with deadly force. The first to hit was the Great Plague of 1665-1666. This fatal pestilence brought the last major epidemic of the bubonic plague to England. The lethal disease killed an estimated 100,000 people, nearly one-fourth of London’s population. The infestation was spread by rats due to the dismal sanitation conditions. The cobbled stones of the city were covered with animal dung. Rubbish was thrown from the houses. Human and animal sewage was



THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

everywhere. Flies filled the air. The foul stench was suffocating London. The effects of the plague were everywhere.

Soon thereafter, a major fire broke out known as the Great Fire of London. This blazing inferno swept through the central parts of the already ravaged city from September 2 to September 5, 1666. The fire started at a bakery and spread rapidly across the devastated city. A strong wind fanned the flames into a firestorm, leaving devastation in its path. Included in the destruction was the Royal Palace of Whitehall, where Charles II lived. The aristocratic district of Westminster was also ignited. Most of the suburban slums were consumed. In all, the Great Fire consumed 13,200 houses, 87 parish churches, 44 halls, the Royal Exchange, the Custom House, St. Paul's Cathedral, and more. As many as 200,000 people were dispersed from their living quarters.

## **SECOND CONVENTICLE AND TEST ACTS**

In 1670, the Second Conventicle Act was passed by Parliament. The purpose was to further "prevent and suppress Seditious Conventicles." This oppressive act was meant to restrict Nonconformist worship by imposing a fine on any person attending a religious assembly other than the Church of England. This constraining law was intended to coerce people to attend the services of the national church and hinder any underground Puritan movement. Further, any person who allowed his house to be used as a meetinghouse for a religious assembly would be fined. The Cavalier Parliament required all persons holding any public office to take the oaths of supremacy and allegiance to the Crown. Likewise, this act required all public officials to take communion in the Church of England.

## 4

# KILLING TIME

In 1680, Scotland entered another period of severe conflict between the Covenanter movement and Charles II and later James VII. Richard Cameron, the leader of the militant Covenanters, rode into Sanquhar, Scotland and the Sanquhar Declaration was read in the public square. This announcement declared that the people of Scotland would no longer accept the authority of Charles II over them because he would not recognize their religion. The Declaration renounced all Scottish allegiance to the Stuart monarchy and opposed the royal succession of his Roman Catholic brother, James, to the throne. This reading was, in reality, a declaration of war by the Covenanters of Scotland against the throne of England. Cameron traveled throughout southwest Scotland, preaching before growing crowds.

Charles II attempted to stop this movement. A prolonged season of conflict followed, further setting the English forces of Charles II against the Scottish people. Thousands of Scottish Covenanters were persecuted and hundreds martyred by the English for holding fast to Cameron's ideas. On February 8, 1685, Charles II died at Whitehall Palace after suffering an epileptic fit. On his deathbed, he was received into the Catholic Church. This bloody season of warfare would continue under the next king, James II, until 1688.

## JAMES II CROWNED

Charles II was succeeded to the throne by his brother, James II, the second surviving son of Charles I. This new monarch was immediately suspected by the Puritan faithful as being like his father and brother, that is, being pro-French, pro-Catholic, and believing in an absolute monarchy. James II continued in the footsteps of his brother in the relentless persecution of the Presbyterian Covenanters in Scotland. Moreover, he produced a son, who would be, doubtlessly, a Catholic heir to the British throne. A difficult future seemed inevitable for what remained of the Puritan remnant.

This sobering reality gripped the Protestants. They believed their only hope was to summon the son-in-law and nephew of James II, William of Orange in the Netherlands—married to Mary Stuart, the daughter of James II—to come to their defense. They urged William to lead an invasion of the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, and Ireland and secure it from a prolonged Catholic reign. William answered the plea for help by sailing across the North Sea and English Channel with a large Dutch fleet and army. He landed in southwest England at Torbay and asserted, “The liberties of England and the Protestant religion, I will maintain.” After this successful intrusion into England, William sailed to Belfast, Northern Ireland, where he secured a great victory for Protestant cause.

This invasion of England became known as the Glorious Revolution, or the Bloodless Revolution because it was accomplished without military opposition. The defense of James II collapsed quickly due to his lack of resolve to resist the aggressive advance of William of Orange. The defeated king fled England for the safety of France. James II was the last Roman Catholic monarch to reign over the Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland. This triumph marked a conclusion to many long years of suffering for the Nonconformists in England and Scottish Presbyterians. Many had lived in hope of it, but had not lived to see and enjoy it.

## THE ACT OF TOLERATION

With William and Mary upon the throne, two committed Protestants were joint monarchs of the United Kingdom. The enthronement of these co-sovereigns led to the passing of the Toleration Act by the Parliament of England



JAMES II AND VII (OCTOBER 14, 1633 – SEPTEMBER 16, 1701)

in 1689. This law provided a new measure of freedom of worship for Nonconformists in Great Britain. The Dissenters were now allowed to obtain licenses for their meeting places in order to gather for public worship. Moreover, they could lawfully have their own teachers and preachers, who would feed them Reformed instruction in the word.

In some ways, the Act of Toleration marked the conclusion of what we might call the Puritan era. What had begun as an attempt to purify the doctrine and worship of the Church of England in the middle of the sixteenth century, giving rise to a movement or number of movements within and without the national church seeking freedom to worship according to the Word of God as it bound the conscience of his servants, was brought to conclusion with the passing of the Act of Toleration at the end of the seventeenth century. This new legislation ushered in religious toleration for Protestant Dissenters not previously enjoyed. The Act of Toleration protected the Nonconformists from the force of the repressive legislation of previous monarchs, granting a much sought after measure of liberty to worship God according to conscience than those before them could have imagined. At the same time, we should not imagine that Dissenters were considered as equal citizens. The Act of Toleration did not remove the previous Acts from the statute books - it merely suspended many of their strictures.

The strength and force of Puritanism was now waning. Many of the influential leaders and key players of Puritanism and Nonconformity had died before the Act of Toleration was passed. Thomas Goodwin went to glory in 1680, John Owen in 1683, and John Bunyan in 1688. A new generation of pastors and believers was coming on to the scene and new battle lines were being drawn. The Adversary of men's souls attacked the church of Christ by other means - force having in many respects failed, spiritual fraud crept in at many points. In the absence of persecution, some seemed to lose their spiritual urgency and clarity. In the years to come, some drifted away from the truths for which the previous generations had been willing to shed blood, perhaps fearful of a return to those days or in other cases characterized by a very different spirit. At the same time, there were good and godly Christians who continued to stand firm as new challenges arose.

However, the prayers of the Puritans have not gone unanswered. Through successive generations, Christians around the globe have held the same principles,

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embraced the same precepts, and followed the same patterns. The Puritan influence can be traced in countless movements of faithfulness and fruitfulness, spurring on reformation, renewal and revival in various groups and in different denominations. The recovery of a genuinely and spiritually Puritan doctrine and devotion has led to much blessing in many places. Even where the Puritan name and history is not known, the same spirit of obedience to God's Word in the face of persecutions and deceptions continues to animate faithful men and women in God's kingdom. In many instances, the Puritans and their immediate successors go on providing an example to encourage and stir those who hold the same basic convictions and who entertain the same desires.

The Puritans were not perfect. Neither were or are their successors. We do them no honour by pretending otherwise. They did not get everything right, nor were they the monolithic movement that we too often imagine. Nevertheless, their root concern for a careful, Spirit-empowered, whole-souled obedience flowing from ardent love to God in Christ provides an enduring model of biblical Christianity that we cannot afford to ignore. If that was the Puritan spirit, it remains one that we can and should cultivate, to the glory of God and for the good of the church.



# ONEPASSION

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OnePassion Ministries is the teaching and preaching ministry of Dr. Steven J. Lawson.

OnePassion exists to ignite a supreme passion for God and His glory in all people throughout the world. As our name indicates, the strategic goal of this ministry is to enflame hearts with an all-consuming desire for Jesus Christ and His gospel. Our primary aim for believers from every walk of life is that they be revived and emboldened to live exclusively for the greatness of God. This intentional focus is to impart the knowledge of the truth by equipping pastors and church leaders, maturing lay people, and launching a new reformation in the church today.

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