

The Dark Ages

After a few weeks break, we return to our series of *Scoop* articles concerning the Bible's journey from the original writers to its existence in English today. It has been a long complex voyage, but God has delivered it to us with the message perfectly and fully intact.

We have discussed how the early Greek and Latin translations developed in the Western world. In our last article we learned about Jerome and how he came to produce the Latin Vulgate (c. 400AD), which stood as the standard version of Holy Scripture in the West for a thousand years.

After the fall of the Roman Empire and the quick expansion of Islam in North Africa and the Middle East, Europe fell into the Dark Ages. The vast wealth and stability of the Romans gave way to a seriously depressed economy and civilization in Europe. Poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition controlled the masses for centuries.

The church eventually consolidated itself into two parts — the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East. Christianity as it had been known for hundreds of years after the time of Christ would look completely differently than it had before. The priests and monks came to control the institutional church and the people's access to God and His Word. The priests controlled the worship and forgiveness of sin aspects of the church. The monks and friars held control over ministry, education, and literacy. The monks also made the only copies of God's Word, but did not make them available to the people.

I suppose some would say it was a good thing the monks lived their cloistered lives in the monasteries. This allowed them to protect, copy, and study God's Word, since the rest of the people were incapable of

reading it and generally too ignorant to understand it anyway. But, I think the truth is that people were kept isolated away from the saving and freeing message of the gospel because of not having access to God's Word. In essence, they were cut off from the gospel. Remember, the priests didn't even preach directly from the Bible in worship services either.

Eventually, the weight of depression and oppression became too much for the commoners of Europe, and their collective hearts began to yearn for the truth of God's Word in Christ.

In the same way that Jesus the Messiah came like "a root out of dry ground," so it would be that the message of the Word of God would begin to grow in the hearts and minds of the people as they slowly came to gain access to the Scriptures and good Bible teaching.

It started with a few godly priests who saw the corruption of their own religious system and began to preach and teach directly from the Scriptures. But it wasn't long until the ordinary people demanded to be able to read, study, and own copies of the Bible for themselves. A wave of reform was about to come upon "the Christian West." The Bible would be made available for all people to read for themselves!

One last point—a very important point! It is vital that we remember the Holy Spirit still uses the Word of God as His main tool for communicating the truth of the gospel into the lives of lost and hurting people today. We in the church need to help people find open-hearted access to the Good News.

The institutional church today is not the gatekeeper of the kingdom or the master of the message, like it claimed to be in the Dark and Middle Ages. We are but simple clay vessels that carry a tremendous treasure (2 Corinthians 4:7). We are only the laborers that our Lord has in the field helping scatter seed and gather in the harvest. We need to set the Word free into people's lives and not try to control it like the priests and monks of old did. Let us teach and preach the truth, and then allow the Holy Spirit to apply it to people's lives in His time and in His way.

We must help people come out of their own dark age so they too can see the light of the gospel. Paul says we will be like "the stars of the heavens as [we] hold out the Word of Life" (Philippians 2:15-16).

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