

John Knox

by Simonetta Carr

with Illustrations by Matt Abraxas



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John Knox

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Cover artwork by Matt Abraxas: After a few months of hiding, Knox made the difficult decision to leave England and crossed the English Channel to nearby France.

For additional artwork by Matt, see pages 9, 13, 17, 21, 23, 29, 33, 39, 43, 47, 53, 55.

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MAP CREATED BY TOM CARROLL

A map of Western Europe during John Knox's life. You may want to use it to follow his travels.

Introduction



As a schoolboy growing up in the small Scottish town of Haddington, John Knox could never have imagined that he would become a major leader of a powerful movement that would transform Scotland into one of the most committed Protestant countries in the world.

Around the time Knox was born, probably in 1514, Scotland was a small, remote country that many people considered wild and mysterious. Still, even in that faraway corner of the world, as in most of Europe, people had started to voice their disappointment in the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, which was the only type of Christian church in Western Europe. Some of the problems were obvious: these leaders often became rich at the expense of the poor or defiantly broke God's commandments to satisfy their selfish desires. Some people, however, protested against deeper problems: they believed some of the church's teachings were contrary to the Bible. These protestors were later called Protestants.



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John Knox, as he was portrayed in a book published around his time.

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This is the only portrait of Patrick Hamilton. It was painted more than a hundred years after his death, so we can't be absolutely sure the Reformer looked like this.

At first, most Protestants lived in Germany and Switzerland, and Scottish Roman Catholic authorities tried hard to keep books and ideas from those countries out of Scotland. They also tried to keep the common people from reading the Bible. If everyone read it, they thought, there would be too many interpretations and a lot of confusion.

Some Scots, however, traveled to other countries, where they discovered the gospel as exciting, good news: Christ did everything for our salvation, and the special offerings, good works, and prayers the church was requiring were not necessary. One of these Scottish travelers was Patrick Hamilton, who heard the gospel in France and then spread the news in Scotland until he was captured and killed. The authorities hoped his death would stop others from accepting his beliefs. Instead, many who had never thought about these matters began wondering why he had been killed and if maybe he had been right.

CHAPTER ONE

A Young Man in a Troubled Country



DAVID CARR

Hailes Castle, near Haddington. It seems that Knox's grandfathers and father provided some service to the castle owners, the Earls of Bothwell.

John Knox was about fifteen at the time of Hamilton's death, and he probably heard about what happened because Hamilton was the first Protestant in Scotland to die for his faith. We don't know anything about Knox's childhood, but at this time he might have enrolled at St. Andrews University—or he may have been getting ready to go there—because young people then started university much earlier than they do now.

After Knox finished his studies, he was ordained to be a priest, but he used his knowledge of church law mainly to work as a notary in and around Haddington. Notaries usually check documents and sign them to show that what is written in them is correct. It was probably a fairly quiet job.

In the meantime, many things in Scotland were changing. The king, James V, died from a sudden illness, leaving the throne to his six-day-old daughter, Mary Stuart. Because she was only a baby, the Earl of Arran (we will call him Arran from now on) was chosen to make decisions for her. Eager to make peace with England, a long-time enemy of Scotland, Arran discussed with its king, Henry VIII, the idea of a future marriage between Mary and Henry's son, Edward, who was five at that time.



Portrait of James Hamilton, 2nd Earl of Arran and Duke of Chatelherault, by Arnold Van Bronckhorst

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King Henry had broken all ties with the Church of Rome. With the backing of this powerful friend, Arran decided to allow some freedom of worship to the Protestant lords who had been requesting it. For the first time, the common people were allowed to read the Bible. During this time Knox heard God's message of salvation through faith alone preached in a church. The sermon might have been on John 17, because later Knox said that chapter is where he cast his "first anchor."



Knox heard the preaching of God's message of salvation through faith alone in Christ.



King Henry VIII

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Around the same time, Knox became a tutor for three boys from two families, teaching them typical subjects such as Latin grammar and literature, English, and possibly French. Because they were Protestant, the boys also studied the Bible. Knox probably enjoyed this time of freedom.

This freedom and peace, however, didn't last long. King Henry started to make strong demands on Scotland, so the Scottish leaders tossed out any idea of giving Mary to his son in marriage. Furious, Henry sent a large army to terrorize the people, and the soldiers burned whole cities, including the area where Knox lived. He even sent men to kidnap Mary, but the Scottish leaders hid her well.

At that point, most of the Scottish leaders looked for help from France, where Mary Stuart's mother, Mary of Guise, was born. Arran sided with these leaders. Since France was a Roman Catholic country, he put a stop to the freedom the Protestants had been given.

CHAPTER TWO

From Bodyguard to Preacher



George Wishart

Even though Protestants were no longer free, some continued to proclaim the gospel around the country. George Wishart was an important preacher who had studied the Protestant teachings in England and Switzerland and proclaimed them boldly both in churches and open-air sermons. He had a band of close followers who went with him to assist and protect him. These followers included Knox and the two men who had hired Knox as a tutor. At this time, both Wishart and Knox were about thirty years old. Preaching in public was dangerous, and Wishart knew that one day he would be killed. Still, he said he would always dare to preach if people dared to listen.

After a while it was clear that Wishart would not be able to avoid the authorities who were trying to catch him. Knox and his friends wanted to stay with him until the end, but Wishart sent them home, saying, “No, return to your boys, and God bless you. One is sufficient for a sacrifice.”

Probably Knox had mixed feelings. He loved Wishart very much and wanted to fight for the gospel until the end, but he understood that sometimes it's better to stay alive and fight other battles. He said good-bye to his dear friend, gave up the sword, and returned home with his students' fathers.

That same night, at midnight, some guards surrounded the house where Wishart was staying. At first they offered to protect him if he surrendered, but when he did, they took him to Cardinal David Beaton, the highest authority in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, who imprisoned him as a rebel.



Wishart asked Knox to give up his sword.