



THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

4 REMARKABLE PROVIDENCES

Christian Biographies
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EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE ASSEMBLY

The Reformation brings the biblical doctrines of Luther and Calvin to England

William Tyndale's English Bible puts God's Word into the hands of the people

Mary Tudor's reign scatters the Reformed to the continent, where they mature under the ministry of men like Calvin

The enthronement of Elizabeth I brings the "via media," which ended bloodshed but frustrated many Reformed Christians.

The Puritan movement grows during the early 1600s out of frustration for unbiblical worship practices.

Archbishop Wm. Laud persecutes Puritans, leading to the 1630 Puritan migration



EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE ASSEMBLY

Parliament and Puritans ally in opposition to the Stuart monarchs.

1640: The Long Parliament opposes King Charles I

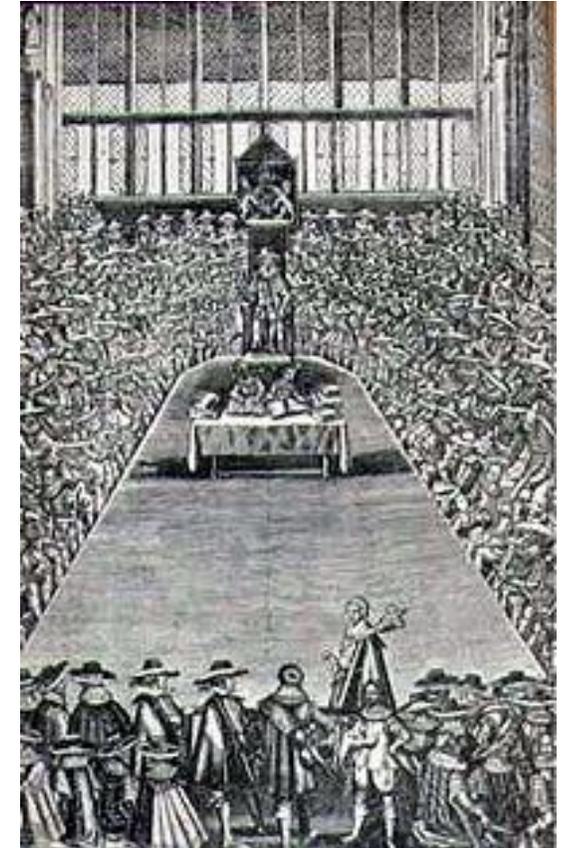
1642: Charles I dissolves Parliament, attempts to arrest troublesome members

Cities declared for either Parliament or Crown, leading to the English Civil War

June 12, 1643: Parliament calls for an assembly to “advise” them on church Reforms

- 2 divines from each country, 4 from London, 2 each from Oxford and Cambridge

1643: The Westminster Assembly begins deliberations



2. DELIVERANCE FROM STATE CONTROL

The Assembly was called by Parliament's authority and was subject to it. The pastor/theologians only were permitted to advise Parliament, who would implement its own agenda.

Parliament's approval threatened to corrupt the work of the Assembly, as the Confession and Catechisms required their approval.

God's providential deliverance:

- The war began badly, with royal victories in 1643.
- Charles I summoned professional troops from Roman Catholic Ireland
- London (and the Assembly) was gravely threatened
- Parliament needed military help



2. DELIVERANCE FROM STATE CONTROL

Parliament's solution was to sign a treaty with Scotland: The Solemn League and Covenant (Sept. 25, 1643)

- A military and spiritual alliance
- Secured Scottish military intervention
- Required and guaranteed a Presbyterian church government
- Scottish commissioners to the Assembly were granted right of approval

B. B. Warfield: “by the Solemn League and Covenant, the work of the Assembly of divines was revolutionized and the real work of the Assembly became possible.”



3. EXTRAORDINARY MEN IN PERILOUS TIMES

Richard Baxter: “men of eminent learning and godliness, ministerial ability and fidelity.”

Men of extraordinary education

- Lazarus Seaman carried an unpointed Hebrew text for daily reading
- William Twisse was “full of learning and subtle speculative genius”
- Cornelius Burgess “an eminent debator and valiant defender of Presbyterianism.
- John Lightfoot “the greatest Rabbinical scholar of his age
- Thomas Goodwin, whose “great attainments in scholarship and the range and variety of his thoughts astonish us.”
- Samuel Rutherford, Alexander Henderson, Jeremiah Burroughs, Obadiah Sedgwick

Men of valor committing a criminal act by meeting together



4. AN EXTRAORDINARY PERCH IN CHURCH HISTORY

The Westminster divines were beneficiaries of all the theology and confessions of the previous century: they were not working out their theology, but their expression of it.

- The First and Second Helvetic Confessions
- The Scots Confession
- The Heidelberg Catechism
- The Belgic Confession
- The Canons of the Synod of Dordt
- The Thirty-Nine Articles

As a result, the Westminster Assembly produced precious documents still highly valued almost 500 years later: the Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, and the Directory of Public Worship.

