

John Owen

by Simonetta Carr

with Illustrations by Matt Abraxas



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John Owen

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Cover artwork by Matt Abraxas: Owen reading his Catechism to a family. For additional artwork by Matt, see pages 9, 15, 19, 25, 29, 31, 33, 35, 43, 45, 47, 51, and 53.

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MAP CREATED BY TOM CARROLL

A map of England during John Owen's time. As you read this book, you may want to follow his travels on this map.

Introduction



John Owen was born in the town of Stadhampton, near Oxford, England, in 1616 and lived for sixty-seven years during a very difficult period of English history. Many people consider him to be the greatest English theologian (a theologian is someone who studies and teaches about God).

About a century before John Owen was born, when England was still a Roman Catholic country, King Henry VIII disagreed with the pope and set himself up as the head of the Church of England. All Christian communities in England had to be part of this church. To help people adjust to the change, some theologians compiled a book of prayers and rules, called the Book of Common Prayer. Many Christians thought that this book was good because it had excellent teachings, similar to those taught by Luther and Calvin.



John Owen (1616–1683)

Over the years, however, the Book of Common Prayer changed. By the time John Owen was born, some thought that its rules were too similar to those ordered by the pope and that the fancy clothes, ceremonies, and decorations the Church of England required or allowed distracted people from the main purpose of worship, which is the glory of God. Because they chose not to conform to (or accept) all these rules, they were called Nonconformists. Because they wanted to make their worship of God as pure and simple as it is in the New Testament, they were also called Puritans.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL CARTER, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Old Ship Church, Hingham, Massachusetts,
built around 1635 by Puritans



PHOTO BY LORENZO FRATTI, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Roman Catholic cathedral in Milan, Italy

CHAPTER ONE

Growing and Studying in Difficult Times



PHOTO BY WILLIAM WELLS

St. John the Baptist Church in Stadhampton was built five hundred years before John Owen's birth.

John Owen's father was a Puritan pastor. He loved God and worked hard for Christ's church, teaching his children to do the same. Young John probably heard his father talk a lot about the importance of worshiping God just as the Bible teaches us to do. He also heard that many Puritans were leaving the country to go to lands where they could worship freely: some to Germany, some to Holland, and some to the New World, America.



John was very smart. When he was twelve, he entered college with one of his brothers, who was four years older than John. His studies were paid for by a rich uncle who encouraged him to make a good career in the Church of England. John studied hard, but he also found time for other activities, like playing the flute and performing the javelin toss and the long jump. All this kept him so busy that he had only four hours of sleep each night. Many years later, he said that he was sorry to have sacrificed his sleep because he had damaged his health.



In college, John Owen found time for many activities, like javelin toss.

While John was in college, many changes were troubling England. Some decisions made by the king, Charles I, caused his group of councilors (called Parliament) to become very angry. They didn't like that the king had demanded new taxes and had started a losing war against Scotland without talking to them first, as he had agreed to do. On the other hand, the king didn't always want to talk to the Parliament because he thought that they wanted to have too much power.



King Charles I (1600–1649)

The Puritans were also worried because the king had become very strict about the rules of worship, punishing hard those who refused to conform to the Book of Common Prayer. Someone who inspired and supported the king in his restriction of the Puritans was Archbishop William Laud, the highest religious authority in England, who disagreed with them even on the most important matters of salvation.



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Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645)