



HUGH BINNING



Hugh Binning's family was well off, so they could afford to make sure that he had a very good education. Hugh showed that he was good at learning. In fact, he was so good at learning the Latin language that he was better at it than all the older boys in the school. He proved himself to be what we call a genius, someone who has advanced talents that are out of the ordinary. When the other boys went off to play he would either pray to God on his own or go and find some godly people to talk to. This was what he preferred. It was not that he was unsociable or unfriendly, he had a cheerful nature. He just felt drawn to spiritual things when he was not studying. He found close friendship with God himself in prayer and loved to live in a way that pleased the Lord.

By the age of thirteen or fourteen he was such an experienced believer that the most mature Christians went to him for spiritual help and encouragement. He was not just a genius, he was a godly genius who advanced beyond others in spiritual things as well as in learning. He had such an amazing memory that he could listen to a sermon and then go away and write it out fully word for word.

As you might guess, Hugh went very early to university. He tackled the difficult subject of philosophy. This goes very deeply into how we think and reason and what makes a good argument. He was able to think carefully about the nature of reality, science, and things in the natural world. The more he understood of the world around him, the more it made

him wonder at the wisdom and glory of God. None of it was difficult to him at all. In fact, he was able to do more in one hour than others could do in many days by hard study. But this did not make him proud; he was always humble, not thinking that he was better than others. He started to study theology next, to learn more about God and the Bible.

At the same time they were looking for a new professor of philosophy. People were urging Hugh to apply. He was not sure and did not like to make too much of himself. Eventually he agreed. He was clearly the best person for the job. But he was actually so young that he was going to be the same age as his students! They knew, however, that Hugh was wise enough that this would not be a problem for him.

As well as such a demanding job he managed to complete the theology course. After several years of this important job, he was eager to do what he believed God was calling him to and what he wanted to do more than anything. He was going to become a minister.

He had to preach before all the local ministers so that they could see if he was suitable for becoming a minister. He prepared his sermon and decided to send it to a friend – a godly lady who was in Edinburgh. He did not like to put his name on it as this seemed a bit boastful. She found it such a precious sermon that she showed it to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh who was like the mayor of the city. He immediately said that whoever this eminent minister was, they needed to send a call to him to come to a congregation in Edinburgh. But then Hugh wrote asking for his sermon back

again. She realised that it was not even from a minister at all!

He became a minister in a part of Glasgow called Govan when he was still very young, just 22. As part of becoming a minister he was asked to give a lecture on a very difficult subject in theology. Dr John Strang, a professor of theology was someone who had studied this difficult subject for a long time. He was astonished. “Where has this young man got all this learning and reading?”, he asked.

Hugh Binning was humble but that did not mean that he would shy away from ever preaching, even if those in the congregation were going to be very important or very godly. A friend said to him that this was strange since he was otherwise so humble and did not want to put himself forward. Hugh gave the reason. If he was called to preach his master in any place he could not do anything else but say, “Here am I, send me. Why should I resist Christ’s call? If Christ is present who is so holy and so much to be revered, who else am I going to dread or be aware of? I forget who is present, and who is absent.”

Once he had to speak in front of Oliver Cromwell who was the ruler of England and Scotland after King Charles had been put to death. Cromwell’s troops were now occupying Scotland after his invasion. Cromwell once sent the soldiers into the General Assembly of the Church, the national meeting of elders and ministers. They were ordered not to have any more national meetings. Cromwell wanted to get the Scots to change the way the Church was governed.

The Scottish Church had always been governed by ministers and elders in regional and national meetings as well as in congregations. We call this Presbyterian Church government. Presbyter is the Greek New Testament word for elder. But Cromwell thought that he could persuade them to stop having churches working together in this way. Each congregation would be completely independent from others. But the Scots had carefully examined the Bible and decided that it was clear that congregations are to work together. Where there is a problem, the elders of congregations can come together to decide about it. You can read about how this was done in Acts chapter 15.

To get the Scots to change their minds, Cromwell organised a debate at Glasgow between some Independents and the Scots Presbyterians. But he had not reckoned on Hugh Binning’s biblical understanding and clear reasoning. Hugh spoke so powerfully and convincingly that Cromwell was astonished. So were the Independent ministers. They did not know what to say or how to answer. “What’s the name of that learned and bold young man” asked Cromwell. When he heard his surname it reminded him of the word binding. So he said “He has bound well indeed”, speaking about his strong arguments. “But”, said Cromwell (laying his hand on his sword), “this will loose all again.”

With all his learning and ability Hugh Binning knew how to make difficult things easy to understand. His sermons were actually quite simple. Great crowds wanted to hear him preach because they were able to get so much from his

sermons. He spoke so clearly, powerfully and persuasively that someone said, “there is no speaking after Hugh Binning.” You could not add something that he had missed out and you could not argue against what he had said. But he was a humble and godly genius. Sometimes people tell us the right things but they do not do them themselves. Hugh Binning was different; he practised what he preached in the way that he lived. As someone said, “He lived as he spoke, and spoke as he lived.”

But Hugh Binning’s life was going to be short. He only lived to be 26. Yet he had lived in such fellowship with God that it was a delight for him to be taken to heaven. He was like Enoch who walked with God and then the Lord took him to be with himself. When he was buried, they put up a stone that told people about his life. The most important words were the last which read: “He changed his country, not his company, because when on earth he walked with God.”

Maybe you like to read books and learn about people like Hugh Binning. Maybe you prefer to make things with your hands. It is important to use the gifts that God has given us, whatever they may be. We may never be a genius like Hugh Binning. But more importantly, there is no reason why we should not strive to be godly as he was. Of course we first need to have a new heart that trusts and loves God above all things and wants to please him. The Bible tells us that the best life is not the most successful life: it is the most godly life. To be godly and content is great gain. Godliness benefits us in everything in this life and it prepares us for the life to come.

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KEY DATES

1638

Scots begin to sign the National Covenant to prevent changes to the Church.

1640

Hugh Binning goes to university.

1642

English Civil War begins.

1645

Oliver Cromwell's 'New Model Army' is established.

1646

Charles I surrenders to the Scots.

1650

Hugh Binning is married. Oliver Cromwell invades Scotland.

1651

Cromwell defeats Charles II at the Battle of Worcester.



1627

Hugh Binning is born.



1633

Charles I crowned in Scotland.



1637

Scots protest against a prayer-book being forced on them.



1639-1640

King Charles I declares war on Scots but is defeated.



1641

Rebellion breaks out in Ireland.



1643

Solemn League and Covenant is signed between Scots and English Parliament. The Westminster Assembly begins.



1646

Hugh Binning begins to teach philosophy.



1649

Hugh Binning becomes minister of Govan. Charles I is executed.



1651

Hugh Binning debates English ministers before Cromwell. Charles II is crowned king of Scotland.



1653

Hugh Binning dies. Oliver Cromwell makes himself Lord Protector.

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WORD SEARCH



CAN YOU FIND ALL THE HIDDEN WORDS IN THIS WORD SEARCH?

W S C I E N C E C R O M W E L L G T
 J L E N O C H D H Q K Z W P T L O H
 T V K I R P I D F I K L P H Q E D E
 C O N G R E G A T I O N R I S A L O
 P R E A C H C G I F T S E L T R I L
 D I S W O R D E B P B F S O U N N O
 X X D Y S T U D E N T Q B S D I E G
 O X N X L G E N I U S D Y O Y N S Y
 M B U N I V E R S I T Y T P D G S X
 Q M I N I S T E R N I R E H E E J Q
 D I G L A S G O W N H W R Y B B S U
 R P R O F E S S O R X E L D E R S R

WORDS ARE HIDDEN → ↓ AND ↘.

CONGREGATION
 CROMWELL
 ELDERS
 ENOCH
 GENIUS
 GIFTS
 GLASGOW

GODLINESS
 LEARNING
 MINISTER
 PHILOSOPHY
 PREACH
 PRESBYTER
 PROFESSOR

SCIENCE
 STUDENT
 STUDY
 SWORD
 THEOLOGY
 UNIVERSITY