

Foundations of Biblical History
God Prepares England
Rev. David Seeley
Lesson 11

In our last lesson we learned about the work of William Tyndale in translating the Bible into English. He was executed by order of King Henry VIII on October 6, 1536. His last words were, "Lord open the eyes of the King of England!"

In three short years, God answered Tyndale's prayer, but not in a way anyone may have expected.

"It was not that King Henry VIII had a change of conscience regarding publishing the Bible in English. His motives were more [evil]... but the Lord sometimes uses the evil intentions of men to bring about His glory. King Henry VIII had in fact, requested that the Pope permit him to divorce his wife and marry his mistress.

The Pope refused. King Henry responded by marrying his mistress anyway, (later having two of his many wives executed), and...renouncing Roman Catholicism, taking England out from under Rome's religious control, and declaring himself as the reigning head of State to also be the new head of the Church.

This new branch of the Christian Church, neither Roman Catholic nor truly Protestant, became known as the Anglican Church or the Church of England. King Henry acted essentially as its "Pope". His first act was to further defy the wishes of Rome by funding the printing of the scriptures in English... the first legal English Bible... just for spite." -www.greatsite.com

"Myles Coverdale and John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers had remained loyal disciples the last six years of Tyndale's life, and they carried the English Bible project forward and even accelerated it. Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament, and in 1535 he printed the first complete Bible in the English language, making use of Luther's German text and the Latin as sources. Thus, the first complete English Bible was printed on October 4, 1535, and is known as the Coverdale Bible." ---www.greatsite.com

"In 1539, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the [request] of King Henry VIII to publish the "Great Bible". It became the first English Bible authorized for public use, as it was distributed to every church, chained to the pulpit, and a reader was even provided so that the illiterate could hear the Word of God in plain English.

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It would seem that William Tyndale's last wish had been granted...just three years after his martyrdom. Cranmer's Bible, published by Coverdale, was known as the Great Bible due to its great size: a large pulpit folio measuring over 14 inches tall. Seven editions of this version were printed between April of 1539 and December of 1541.”—www.greatsite.com

For a period of time there was freedom to print the Word of God in English. England was no longer under the rule of the Pope. That freedom did not last long. After King Henry VIII's death, King Edward VI took the throne. He was followed by the reign of Queen “Bloody” Mary.

Queen Mary was a loyal Roman Catholic. She persecuted and killed hundreds of Protestants and Anglicans (members of the church of England) during her reign. She ordered that all English Bible be burned.

She ordered the execution of John “Thomas Matthew” Rogers and Thomas Cranmer in 1555. This was a very dark time in the history of England.

Queen Mary's vicious campaign caused hundreds of people to leave England to seek safety in Geneva, Switzerland. Among those who assembled in Geneva were a number of great English scholars. These scholars produced a new English Bible that became known as the Geneva Bible.

The completed Geneva Bible was published in 1560. By this time, Queen Elizabeth I had succeeded the throne of Queen Mary. This Geneva Bible was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I.

Elizabeth I promoted a complete separation of England from the Roman Catholic Church.

The new Geneva Bible became very successful and popular throughout England. For several generations this Bible was used for personal study in England, Scotland, and later in America.

The Geneva Bible is a Bible of “firsts.”

1. It was the first Bible to be fully translated from the original languages of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic.
2. It was the first Bible to be printed in easy-to-read printing type.
3. It was the first study Bible with marginal notes.
4. It was the first Bible to be divided into chapters and verses.
5. It was the first Bible to be printed in an affordable, and small size that was easy to carry.

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During the reign of Elizabeth I, the Catholic-controlled country of Spain sent a fleet of ships toward England with orders to kill the queen and replace her with a Catholic king or queen.

King Phillip II of Spain was very angry about the spread of Protestantism in England. He launched a sea attack known as the **Spanish Armada** in 1588.

"The Spanish Armada was an enormous 130-ship naval fleet dispatched by Spain in 1588 as part of a planned invasion of England. Following years of hostilities between Spain and England, King Philip II of Spain assembled the flotilla in the hope of removing Protestant Queen Elizabeth from the throne and restoring the Roman Catholic faith in England. Spain's "Invincible Armada" set sail that May, but it was outfoxed by the English, then battered by storms while limping back to Spain with at least a third of its ships sunk or damaged..."

"...The Spanish Armada had lost over 2,000 men during its naval engagements with the English, but its journey home proved to be far more deadly. The once-mighty [fleet] was ravaged by sea storms as it rounded Scotland and the western coast of Ireland.

Several ships sank in the [storms], while others ran aground or broke apart after being thrown against the shore. By the time the 'Great and Most Fortunate Navy finally reached Spain two months later, it had lost as many as 60 of its 130 ships and suffered some 15,000 deaths." www.history.com/topics/british-history/spanish-armada

God had His hand in the defeat of the Spanish Armada. England had a very **weak** military. The Spanish military was strong and powerful. God disrupted the Spanish ships with raging storms, disease, and military defeat.

Their defeat was much like what we read in the Bible in Job 4:9. "By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed."

Had Spain been successful in this attack, England would have gone back to Roman Catholicism.

God was preserving and preparing the nation of England to produce the greatest written work in the history of the world---The King James Bible.

In the spring of 1603, England was at a time of uncertainty and change. Queen Elizabeth I had become very difficult to approach. She was stubborn,

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moody, and unpredictable. She had never married and was childless. Thus, she had no son to take the throne of England. It was up to her to choose the next king.

Many political and religious groups were waiting for her death so they could seek power and influence with the new king. Roman Catholics wanted England to return to Catholicism. Puritans and Protestants wanted to continue the Reformation.

Queen Elizabeth's last few years had been spent ignoring problems or suppressing them. Now the nation was in suspense about the future. Who would take the throne?

Would the new king go back to the Catholicism, persecution, and executions of Protestants? Would the new king continue the Reformation efforts and lead the nation toward a new day of religious tolerance?

As the queen's health faded and she was nearing death, she still refused to reveal who she had chosen to take the throne.

Finally, on her deathbed, Queen Elizabeth made it known that the new king of England was to be King James VI of **Scotland**.

Immediately messengers rode horseback 400 miles north to Edinburgh, Scotland to give word to King James the VI that he was chosen to be King James I of England.

"As they rode north, Sir Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, went with trumpeters and heralds to the gates of Whitehall and Cheapside to proclaim that the Queen was dead, long live the King.

There were bonfires to celebrate the peaceful transition and to prepare the way for the imperial funeral of Elizabeth I and the majestic journey south of the new King." -*The Book of Books, The Radical Impact of the King James Bible*, Melvin Bragg, Hodder & Stroughton, pg. 33

James was in bed, not yet asleep, when the messengers arrived at his Scotland palace to bring him the news. He had been king of Scotland since he was one year old.

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Sir Robert Carey was the first messenger to arrive. He had ridden horseback night and day, for about 72 hours, changing horses several times along the way.

By the time he arrived in Scotland, Sir Robert Carey was bruised and bleeding because he had been kicked by one of his horses.

King James was eager to take his new place as King of England. This was a time in England's history when there was a lot of religious and political uncertainty. The Church of England, established by King Henry VIII had been the official church for forty years. The Bishops of the church loved the security of the established church and were not quick to acknowledge corruption in the church.

On the other side of the debate were the Puritans and Presbyterians. They wanted to purify the Anglican Church (Church of England) from corruption.

Both the Bishops and the Puritans wanted to influence King James in their favor. As we will learn in future lessons, God used King James to unite the country and bring forth a new English Bible that would change the history of the world forever.