

WILLIAM TYNDALE: THE FATHER OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

A. Tyndale's Early Years

1. Born in Gloucestershire (borders on Wales)—between 1491-1494 (probably 1494)
2. His education:
 - Attended very good school for his early education—learned Latin, the language of scholars & the church
 - During his childhood, illegal English translations of the Latin Bible were already circulating!
 - 1506—1512: Earned a Bachelor of Arts degree @ Oxford
 - 1515: Ordained as a priest—and awarded a Master of Arts degree @ Oxford
 - *Began study of theology—passionately interested in the Scriptures*
 - *His complaint: No study of Scripture!*
 - 1516-1522: Student & Instructor @ Cambridge
 - *Here Erasmus taught Greek (!) (1511-12)*
 - *Tyndale developed into a brilliant linguist*
 - *He was fluent in the following languages: Greek, Latin, French, German, Dutch (Flemish), Italian, and Spanish*
 - *Most importantly: Belonged to a Bible study group that met in the White Horse Inn*

B. Tyndale's Commitment to Translate the Bible into English

1. Grows & solidifies as the chaplain to Sir John & Lady Walsh (in Gloucestershire!)—also tutored his children (1522-1523)
 - Graciously was given time to translate NT from Greek
 - His theological convictions shocked local churchmen
 - His bold statement when confronted: *"I defy the pope and all of his laws"..."I shall cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost!"*
 - His burning desire & God's call: To give the Bible to the people of England—in their own language!
2. 1523: Seeks the support of Cuthbert Tunstall, the bishop of London, for his plan to translate the Bible into English—as a scholarly venture
3. The denial of his request:
 - The English authorities did not want the Bible in English—forbidden in 1408; punishable by death!
 - Tyndale's conclusion: He could not translate the Bible in England

C. Tyndale's Translation Work in Europe—as a Fugitive

1. April 1524: Tyndale (30) leaves England to work on the mainland of Europe (Hamburg, Germany?)
 - Supported by wealthy London merchants (Humphrey Monmouth)

- Fully aware that by his decision to translate the Bible abroad, he was breaking the law
 - Also knowing that in Europe (1500) there were 1000 printers vs 2 (poor) printers in England
2. 1524: Traveled to Wittenberg—spent time with Luther & Melanchton—solidifies his grasp of the gospel & translation techniques
 - 1525: He completes his initial translation of the New Testament in the city of Cologne
 - from the Greek Textus Receptus (Erasmus—1516)
 - begins printing of his translation in Germany & Antwerp, Belgium
 - in danger of being arrested—flees to Worms (Luther—1521!) with the “Cologne Fragment” (Matth. 1—22:12)
 3. 1526: Complete edition of the NT published @ Worms.
 - Tyndale arranged for 18,000 copies (!) to be smuggled to London by ship—hidden in bales of straw
 - People in England who could read, read Tyndale’s translation (pocket size!) in secret meetings

“Let it not make thee despair, neither yet discourage thee, O reader, that it is forbidden thee in pain of life and goods, or that it is made breaking of the King’s peace, or treason unto his highness, to read the Word of thy soul’s health—for if God be on our side, what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes”—Tyndale
 - The bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, condemned Tyndale’s translation (2000 mistakes!)
 - Had 6000 copies burned near St. Paul’s Cathedral—like Luther’s writings in 1521!
 - Tyndale’s friend were arrested & executed as heretics
 4. 1527—1533: A very productive period
 - He wrote a number of books
 - *Some criticized teachings of the church.*
 - *Others were about books of the Bible.*
 - *“The Obedience of the Christian Man” motivated Henry VIII to secede from the Church of Rome*
 5. Tyndale realized he could never return to England
 - Declared a heretic by Cardinal Wolsey
 - Also, in light of fierce hostility by Thomas More (Henry VIII’s Lord Chancellor)

“Tyndale’s New Testament is not worthy to be called Christ’s testament, but either Tyndale’s own testament or the testament of his master Antichrist.”
 6. Tyndale labors in Hamburg & Antwerp (1529 →)
 - Having become proficient in Hebrew, he initiates the translation of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch, Jonah, & some historical books
 - He was assisted by close associates: John Fryth, Miles Coverdale, and John Rogers
 - Tyndale’s Bibles continued to be exported to England
 - Thomas Moore’s threat: Painful death for anyone who read Tyndale’s Bible
 - 1530: Henry VIII orders all English Bibles destroyed—anyone distributing them to be burned at the stake (only 2 copies survived!)

- All efforts by Henry VIII & Thomas More to get Tyndale to return to England failed—which infuriated Henry VIII.
7. 1534: His return to Antwerp
 - He went to live with an English merchant, Thomas Poyntz—who also protected him
 - He completed thorough revision of his translation of the NT—“the glory of his life’s work”—his crown jewel!
 - Many copies of the 1534 edition made it to England—including to Ann Boleyn (her copy preserved)!

D. Tyndale’s Premature Death as a Martyr

1. May 21, 1535: Betrayed by a treacherous villain, Henry Phillips—hired by Bishop Stokesley
2. Arrested and all his writings & properties were confiscated
3. OT rescued & preserved by John Rogers (Chaplain to English House & Bloody Mary’s 1st martyr)
4. Then taken to Vilvoorde Castle near Brussels.
5. Europe’s premier scholar imprisoned for 16 months—in dismal circumstances
6. Amazing providence: God uses Tyndale for the conversion of the jailor & his daughter!
7. Tried by 17 commissioners & found guilty of heresy
8. October 6, 1536: Executed by 1) strangling and 2) burning
9. His final words: “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes!”
10. Bottom line: Tyndale gave his life for the Word of God!

E. Tyndale’s Final Prayer Answered

1. Archbishop Cranmer & Thomas Cromwell wanted Tyndale’s translation available to the people
2. Edition promoted & presented to Henry VIII: the Matthew Bible (= Tyndale’s Bible—[Rogers & Cloverdale])
3. Henry VIII agreed and formally endorsed the “Great Bible”—10 months after Tyndale’s execution (1537)!
4. His orders: Every parish in England had to purchase & display a copy of this Bible

F. Final Observations

1. God’s overruling providence secured Tyndale’s —immeasurable! — legacy in history (His story!)
2. The consequences of Tyndale’s work: An English Bible—beautifully worded!—for the vast English speaking world
 - KJV OT: 76% Tyndale
 - KJV NT: 90% Tyndale
3. Tyndale:
 - Father of the English Bible
 - Father of the English language
 - Father of the English Reformation → Puritanism → Pilgrims!
4. Tyndale: Raised up by God to accomplish His good pleasure in Christ!