

William Tyndale: 1490-1536

A Scholar for God and England



William Tyndale

Three men looked up from their circle of chairs near a low-burning coal fire. Their conversation stopped abruptly when a young boy entered the parlor. He carried a round wooden tray laden with cold beef, some bread, and half-filled mugs. He set the tray on a low table by the hearth.

"Thank you. That is all," said Humphrey Monmouth, dismissing the servant. He took up some pewter plates to offer his guests. "Meat and drink will help our planning."

A young clergyman wearing a simple black robe received his plate. "I wish for God to direct my plans," he said. "And I thank him for his provision and your kindness."

"I agree, William," said the third man, a Cambridge professor. "I came only to encourage your efforts. If your work is of God, he will direct the time and way it should be carried out."

"I believe the time has come," said William Tyndale. "I've begun an English translation of the New Testament.

For this I could be arrested. I trust you are on the side of the Holy Scriptures, which must break forth upon England's darkness."

William Tyndale was born in England in the late 1400s. He became a scholar, excelling at language studies—especially Latin and Greek. This enabled him to learn the scriptures before any English translation of the Bible had been published.

Though not from a wealthy family, William Tyndale attended and graduated from Oxford at an early age. Afterward he spent time at Cambridge University, which allowed for ideas of religious reform.

All of England at that time belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. Under church influence, even universities restrained biblical studies. The knowledge of God's word could expose wrong religious practices in the church.

William Tyndale, also ordained as a priest at Oxford, went to live and serve the church in western England. There he observed great spiritual ignorance, even among local clergymen. He became determined to translate the Bible into English. His hope was that even a simple boy that worked behind a plow might someday learn the scriptures.

Tyndale headed to London seeking official church permission for translation work. There he saw abuses of religious power. Church officials lived in palaces. Cardinal Wolsey, who represented the Pope, lived like a king. Even noblemen bowed before him.

In spite of all that power, church leaders felt threatened by commoners—ordinary people—who chal-

In That Day

1490—Leonardo da Vinci develops an oil lamp; **1492**—Christopher Columbus takes his first voyage across the Atlantic Ocean; **1502**—Wittenberg University is founded; **1518**—The African slave trade begins; **1521**—Pope Leo X excommunicates Martin Luther from the Catholic Church; **1531**—Henry VIII of England is recognized as the supreme head of the Church of England.

In the News

Passages—For the past five months, the Oklahoma City Museum of Art has played host to the *Passages*, an exhibit of more than 300 of the world's rarest biblical and historical artifacts. This fascinating collection is privately held by Steve Green, owner and president of Hobby Lobby craft stores. The display showcases a time in which having a Bible in the common language of the people was not only uncommon—it was illegal.

In addition to viewing the variety of old Bibles and artifacts, the exhibit shows a full-scale reproduction of the Gutenberg press. Live actors use the press to explain the process and demonstrate 16th century typesetting. The Reformation Theater gives a glimpse into a conversation between Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Johann Eck in the days leading up to Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg church door.

Another moving interactive display shows Anne Boleyn as she explains her fall from royalty and her ties to William Tyndale. We hear Mr. Tyndale give his last words just moments before being burned at the stake. The room next to this contains a first edition of his *Obedience of Christian Man* as well as a previously undocumented 1535 edition of the New Testament he was working on while imprisoned in the Tower of London.

The *Passages* exhibit is heading to Atlanta, Georgia next and a portion of it will soon be on display in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City. For more information, visit www.explorepassages.com.

lenged church traditions. Martin Luther’s German translation of the New Testament had caused rebellions against the Roman Church. The unrest had spread throughout Europe.

William Tyndale realized he would never gain church approval for his work. With the support of friends like Humphrey Monmouth, he quietly began his translation. In 1524, to avoid church interference, he secretly left England. He took refuge in Germany and changed his name.

After completing his translation, Tyndale sought a high-quality printer. Printing in the 1500s was long, complicated work. And publishing unauthorized materials placed a printer in danger of losing his business, or worse.

But by 1526, thousands of copies of Tyndale’s English New Testament were in print. Copies soon sold openly in England, distributed by reform-minded merchants. But church officials responded with increased

punishments. The gifted scholar was imprisoned and later executed.

His work and influence survived, however. Within a year of William Tyndale’s death in 1536, the King of England granted permission to publish English versions of the Bible. Every church in England soon had one. People began hearing and reading God’s word—even boys that pushed a plow.

—Patti Richter

Bible2Life

From the very beginning, the Bible has been one of the most sought after, as well as one of the most reviled texts of all time. While some have sought to preserve it and pass it down, others have tried to burn, bury, and forget it. We now live in a day where most of us have easy access to the scriptures, yet we take them for granted and forget how their very being is a reminder to us of the nature of the living God. Isaiah 40:8 reminds us that *“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”* No matter what man attempts to do with the scriptures, be it destroy them or simply ignore them, God is faithful to his own Word. It will continue to endure forever.

Qwisdom Check your reading. Check your thinking.

William Tyndale

- 1___ William Tyndale translated the Bible into _____.
a) German, b) English, c) Latin
- 2___ One of William Tyndale’s friends and supporters in his translation work was _____.
a) Humphrey Monmouth, b) Henry Miller, c) Hubert Monroe
- 3___ While translating the Bible in 1524, William Tyndale took refuge in Germany and _____.
a) shaved off his hair, b) chose new friends, c) changed his name
- 4 What led William Tyndale to his desire to translate the Bible into the “common” language of the people?

For more space, use the back.

Qwisdom Answers (skip page when printing)

1) b, 2) a, 3) c

4) The people of England were spiritually ignorant.