

William Tyndale – Reformer and Translator Supreme²

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Elements leading up to the Reformation in England

The beginning of the church in England can be traced back to sometime in the second century. By the fourth century, the church had developed to the point where bishops were representing English interests at the Council of Arles in 314 and the Council of Ariminum in 359. During the next several centuries, Christianity spread throughout much of England. However, when William of Normandy invaded England in the eleventh century and seized the crown, he also took control of the church. What had been a completely independent church was brought under the rule of Rome as William replaced all the

² The substance of this paper was first delivered as a Haddington House lecture on March 18, 2003 in Moncton, New Brunswick. It begins with background material on the Reformation in England and gives a synopsis of William Tyndale's life before introducing the reader to David Daniell's seminal biography.

English bishops, but one, with French prelates. This marked the commencement of the process of the English church becoming nothing more than a vassal of Rome, which had culminated by the time of King John in the early thirteenth century. Rome's hold on the English church and people would remain constant for the next three hundred years until, by the grace of God, the shackles were completely broken.

During this three hundred year period, various seemingly unrelated elements contributed to lay the foundations of the Reformation. Many resented the actions and policies of the Norman kings as they moved the English church and state into the European sphere. It was in these conditions that the seeds of reformation were first sown. During this period when state and church affairs were barely distinguishable, a strong anti-papal movement developed in the upper and ruling classes. At the same time there was an equally strong anti-clerical movement growing in the middle and lower classes. The church itself, under Roman leadership, became increasingly secular and sank to the lowest levels of morality imaginable. The clergy was ignorant and immoral.

This provided the opening for John Wyclif (1324-84). His response was to teach evangelical doctrine and translate the Latin Vulgate into English. For more than one hundred years Wyclif's preachers (Lollards) traveled the length and breadth of the land proclaiming salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. So great was the influence of these itinerant preachers and Wyclif's teaching that the severest measures were taken to try to prevent any further spread of their message. Lollardy was outlawed at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and any adherents who refused to renounce their evangelical convictions were turned over by the church courts to civil authorities for punishment. Hundreds steadfastly and triumphantly went to their death through burning. This continued into the reign of Henry VIII in the next century. In 1408, the Constitution of Oxford forbade the translation of the Scriptures into the English language by any one on his own authority, any offender being regarded as a heretic. However, this did not prevent many of the English Reformers such as Cranmer,

Hooper, and Ridley from being influenced by Wyclif. Wyclif's teaching was another factor that contributed to the eventual work of reform in the English church.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Christian Humanists were also voicing strong condemnation of the abuses of the Roman church: superstitions, pilgrimages, relic-worship, and the scandalous conduct of the monks, their monasteries and religious houses. More and more money was pouring into these institutions; their real estate was ever increasing; and through state contributions to Rome, the nation was being bled financially to fund the opulence of foreign church dignitaries. This was one more aggravation to be borne by Englishmen.

While quite distinct from the Reformation in Germany, Switzerland and France, the Reformation in England was significantly influenced by such literature as the Greek New Testament of Erasmus and especially the writings of Luther. Again, both the civil and ecclesiastical authorities greatly resisted such literature, and a public burning of Luther's books took place at St. Paul's, London in June, 1521.

What brought the final break with Rome was the desire of Henry VIII to have a son who would succeed him on the throne of England. This necessitated a divorce from his wife Catherine, who had previously been married to Henry's brother, Arthur. Catherine had produced a number of children; all but one, Mary, had either died in infancy or were stillborn. Henry thought the solution for having a son would be to have a different wife, necessitating a divorce from Catherine. The grounds for divorce would be the illegitimacy of the marriage, as the Word of God forbids a man to marry his brother's widow. The Pope procrastinated in issuing a decision to annul the marriage, as he feared Emperor Charles, who was Catherine's nephew. This provided Henry the opportunity to take complete control of both state and church, and on June 9, 1534, at Westminster he signed into law the proclamation that severed the Church of England from Rome, making himself her head. It should be noted that Henry remained a quasi-Catholic the rest of his life, burning evangelicals at the stake. However, in the providence of God, he

eventually authorized the sale and reading of the Bible throughout the kingdom.

This brings us to the final element in the various ones that brought about the Reformation in England, the translation of the Scriptures into the English tongue from the original languages. It is here that we are introduced to the man so signally used by God in this work, William Tyndale.

Synopsis of the life of Tyndale.

Tyndale has been referred to as “the true hero of the English Reformation” by one writer, and also as “one of the greatest of Englishmen” by another, R. Demaus. Yet we know very little about this man to whom we are in so great a debt. This is partly because so very few of the details of Tyndale’s life are actually known. With very little information to draw upon, it would appear that historians have tended to resist the work of supplying extensive biographies of his work and life. The standard biography was the one written by R. Demaus and published in 1871, with an edited version by R. Lovett produced in 1904. The next study of Tyndale was written by J. F. Mozley, 1937 and based upon the earlier work. This was followed by the semi-fictionalized account by Brian Edwards, *God’s Outlaw*, in 1976.

There is no documentary evidence of Tyndale until he was a student at Oxford. He was probably born in 1494 in the county of Gloucester, somewhere between Gloucester and Bristol, close to Dursley, at the foot of the Cotswold Hills overlooking the River Severn. The Tyndale family properties indicate that they were reasonably wealthy, and as the family included merchants, they were people of affluence and influence. At this period in English history Gloucestershire was one of the most prosperous counties. While it was a rural area, many of the people engaged in the making of woollen cloth, with the sheep being raised on the nearby hills and Bristol close at hand to serve as the port through which the cloth could be exported. Growing up in this environment accustomed Tyndale to the fact that the world was much larger than Dursley and that English was spoken with a variety of accents and vocabulary.

Tyndale probably entered Oxford University when he was twelve in 1506. The registers record him as having taken his B.A. on July 4, 1512, and being licensed M.A. on June 26, and created M.A. on July 2, 1515. At Oxford, Tyndale would have studied Latin, philosophy and the classics. Sometime while at Oxford, Tyndale was introduced to the teaching of Paul's Epistles, possibly through the influence of John Colet, who had begun expounding the Scriptures in a way that was foreign to the Roman Church. The Greek New Testament of Erasmus probably stimulated Tyndale to begin the study of Greek, the key to understanding the Word of God in the original language. Erasmus spent time at Cambridge, where numbers of students came to a saving knowledge of Christ, some of whom would eventually be burned at the stake for their "heresy." It is uncertain whether Tyndale remained at Oxford in further studies until 1521 or not. Some place him at Cambridge for a short period before he returned to his native Gloucestershire. By now Tyndale's eyes had been opened and his mind made up that the answer to the abuses in the church was to be found in the Word of God.

For the next two years, Tyndale served as tutor to the two young sons of Sir John Walsh and his wife Anne. Anne was of the prominent Poyntz family, also of Gloucestershire. Her nephew, Nicholas, was a close acquaintance of Henry VIII. While in residence at Little Sodbury Manor, Tyndale had plenty of time for further thought and study concerning spiritual matters. Lively conversations would have been common at the meal table. As a notable family, the Walshs' frequently hosted visitors who included various church officers. With Tyndale present, many discussions focused upon truth. At some point prior to his return to Gloucestershire Tyndale had been ordained, consequently he would have been able to use the private chapel of the manor for preaching. It wasn't long before the content of his sermons and ideas were reported to the authorities, and Tyndale was eventually summoned to appear before them, where he was warned of the consequences should he persist in the holding of such erroneous views. It was at this time that he was resolved to translate the Word of God into English.

For the remainder of his life, William Tyndale gave himself to this task of translation, beginning the work in London from 1523-1525. Finding no authoritative protector, he moved to Germany. Tyndale required access to printers and finally settled in Cologne, where he continued his translation work, assisted by William Roye from Greenwich, London. Somehow knowledge of the translators became known to the church authorities, and so Tyndale and Roye moved to Worms in 1526. It was here that the first English New Testament translation from the Greek was printed. As English merchants carried copies back to London, the authorities there seized whatever copies they could and had them burned. From this time on, Tyndale became a hunted man. Tyndale spent the years from 1527 to 1529 in Hamburg, where he wrote several other works while continuing with his translating. It was during this period that he studied Hebrew and also revised his New Testament translation. By now Tyndale had begun work on translating the Pentateuch, and in 1529 the English translation was printed in Antwerp. In all likelihood Tyndale remained here until his arrest in 1535. Great efforts were made to find him, but to no avail. These were years of intense persecution in England; two close friends of Tyndale, Thomas Bilney and Richard Bayfield, were burned at the stake in 1531. Several more works were produced by Tyndale in these years, including his translation of the New Testament and his *Answer* to Sir Thomas More's *Dialogue*, written by More to counter reformed teaching. In 1533, another friend of Tyndale, John Frith, died at the stake. Although the work of the Reformation was spreading across northern Europe, church authorities were intensifying their opposition. Tyndale had to go into hiding but continued his translation work. In 1534, he was able to find shelter in the home of Thomas Poyntz, a relative of Lady Walsh. This same year Tyndale published his revision of the New Testament while continuing work on the Old Testament. He progressed as far as Ezra, and completed Jonah. He was assisted to some degree by Miles Coverdale, another young English reformer, who continued this work after Tyndale's death. On May 21, 1535, William Tyndale was arrested through the treachery of Henry Phillips, who had posed as a friend when actually in the pay of Stokesley,

Bishop of London. Tyndale was taken to Vilvorde Castle, outside of Brussels. Thomas Poyntz did all he could to secure Tyndale's release, but the authorities were not to be moved. After more than a year of imprisonment and appearances before a special commission, in August, 1536, William Tyndale was condemned as a heretic. Early in October, William Tyndale was first strangled, and then immediately burned, tied to a stake.

William Tyndale, A Biography by David Daniell

David Daniell has answered the need for a thorough study of the life and work of William Tyndale in this most excellent book published by Yale University Press as a paperback in 2001.³ Errol Hulse in *Reformation Today*, January/February, 2003, has referred to it as "a superlative definitive biography of Tyndale." David Daniell is eminently qualified to write such a work and to evaluate the translation work of Tyndale. A retired professor of English in the University of London and the editor of Tyndale's New Testament and Tyndale's Old Testament, Daniell also serves as chairman of the William Tyndale Society. The book is written from the position of a most sympathetic biographer.

The actual text of the work is 384 pages and divides the life and work of Tyndale into five parts, which are covered in fifteen chapters. There are eighteen pages of footnotes and ten pages devoted to bibliography. At the close of the text, David Daniell has included three appendices, which include outlines of two of Tyndale's works, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* and *The Obedience of the Christian Man*. What is so significant about the outlines is the manner in which they demonstrate so obviously the rational and biblical reasoning of Tyndale. He follows a distinct path to a clearly defined conclusion.

The book commences with a six-page introduction in which the author reveals something of his own humility in graciously acknowledging the work of previous biographers and the need of yet more work to be done on Tyndale. His own book "is offered to give strength to such studies." It is also noted by

³ David Daniell, *William Tyndale, A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

Daniell that insufficient study is given to Tyndale as a translator. Tyndale was a most remarkable scholar and unsurpassed translator with outstanding linguistic skills. He was fluent in eight languages, including Hebrew, which was virtually unknown in England at the time. He was also a theologian and was just beginning to formulate a reformed body of doctrine, expressing in English what had never been accomplished before, when his life was terminated by the forces of darkness. But, almost 500 years after his death, his translation work continues to affect our lives and thinking.

His unsurpassed ability was to work as a translator with the sounds and rhythms as well as the senses of English, to create unforgettable words, phrases, paragraphs and chapters, and to do so in a way that, again unusually for the time, is still with us today, direct and living: newspaper headlines still quote Tyndale, though unknowingly, and he has reached more people than Shakespeare.... In doing this, he made a language for England. It is common place of Reformation history that Martin Luther seized the chance of advanced Greek studies to make a New Testament in German that gave a disunited Germany a language for the time; it has not been noised abroad sufficiently that Tyndale did something even greater for England. As used to be said with pride, the English rapidly became a people of the Book. To try to understand the literature, philosophy, art, politics and society of the centuries from the sixteenth to the early twentieth without knowledge of the Book is to be crippled. (pp. 2, 3.)

Everyday English in written form was unknown until Tyndale gave England the New Testament in a living and vibrant form.

The Making of the Translator

The first part of the book is entitled “The Making of the Translator” and comprises three chapters covering the period from Tyndale’s birth to his return to Gloucestershire following his university education. Daniell uncovers the family roots, using carefully the little documentation available but at the same time imaginatively describing the environment that Tyndale would have known as a child growing up in Gloucestershire in the west of England. He also is most helpful in suggesting the way in which Tyndale chose the vocabulary to make his translation not only clear but also accurate. The Oxford of Tyndale’s day is presented in such a way that one is able to sympathize with the young and thirsting mind having to engage in dry lectures on logic and philosophy. However, this was no ordinary young mind, and Oxford by this time had begun to move away from continental thinking to a more independent position. Daniell indicates that in general Tyndale was scornful of the theology taught at Oxford, not least of all because an M.A. had to be secured first before theology could be studied. But, by around 1522, Tyndale had attained a high degree of proficiency in Greek, with the ability to translate Greek classics, as well as being an excellent Latin scholar. With very few details to go by, Daniell can only make suggestions as to the way in which Tyndale’s thinking was being shaped. Whether Tyndale spent time at Cambridge is not really clear, the only source being a very brief reference by John Foxe. Tyndale himself never mentions being at Cambridge. Cambridge in the 1520’s was something of a hotbed as numbers of students engaged in discussion of the true meaning of the Scriptures. In 1522, Tyndale was back in Gloucestershire. At this point, Daniell traces briefly the history of the Walsh family, with whom William Tyndale would reside for the next two years. Aside from his tutoring duties, Tyndale now had time to study the Greek New Testament of Erasmus. Using this text there would have been opportunities for preaching and most certainly for lively debate and discussion with Sir John and Lady Walsh and with those who were guests at their table. His preaching aroused the ire of the local clergy, and this resulted in Tyndale being called to appear before the chancellor to answer

the charge of heresy. Tyndale referred to this incident some years later: “And indeed when I came before the chancellor, he threatened me grievously, and reviled me, and rated me as though I had been a dog, and laid to my charge whereof there could be none accuser brought forth (as their manner is not to bring forth the accuser) and yet all the priests of the country were the same day there.” (p. 76.) Tyndale was scolded and threatened by the chancellor, but nothing more came of the charges. The clergy were abysmally ignorant of the Word of God, as Daniell’s documentation shows from Bishop John Hooper’s report thirty years later:

Even in God’s Gloucestershire, thirty years later, investigation under the reforming Bishop Hooper famously reveals details not only of the ‘negligence and ungodly behaviour of the ministers of Gloucestershire’ but ‘inhospitable, non-resident, inefficient, drunken and evil living incumbents, who were to be found in every deanery’. The vicar of Wotten-under-Edge had to answer a charge of forging a will. Their ignorance was great. ‘Of the unsatisfactory clergy in 1551, nine did not know how many commandments there were, 33 did not know where they appeared in the Bible (the Gospel of Matthew was a favourite guess) and 168 could not repeat them. Concerning the Creed, 10 could not repeat it and 216 were unable to prove it; a large number said that they were perfectly satisfied that it was right because the king and Mother Church said so. Most extraordinary of all, perhaps, were the results of the Lord’s Prayer part of the examination: 39 did not know where it appeared in the Bible, 34 did not know who was its author, and 10 actually proved unable to recite it.’ (p. 78.)

By now Tyndale was fully resolved to provide England with the Word of God in the English language so that people might know what God has declared in His Word.

Until it was available in English as a whole book, the humble layman and woman had even less chance of knowing what the New Testament said: it might have been in Chinese for all the sense the Latin made, though some scattered New Testament phrases circulated as proverbs in English, and a few might have seen parts of a Lollard Bible. Tyndale saw that what was needed was a New Testament in English from the Greek. Richard Webbs' narrative concludes famously: 'And soon after, Master Tyndale happened to be in the company of a learned man, and in communing and disputing with him drove him to that issue that the learned man said, we were better without God's law than the pope's: Master Tyndale hearing that, answered him, I defy the Pope and all his laws, and said, if God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of the scripture than thou dost.' (pp. 78, 79.)

Greek into English

The second section of the book is entitled "Greek into English" and covers the years 1523-26, the year that Tyndale spent in London accomplishing first printing of the entire New Testament translated from the Greek into English. In this part of the book Daniell demonstrates that he is a meticulous historian and most familiar with the texts of Tyndale's work. By referring to various pieces of autobiography supplied by Tyndale, particularly in the Prologue to the Old Testament and other sources, Daniell weaves together the facts to provide the overall picture. Where documentation is lacking or doubtful he is not afraid to say so. Tyndale first sought the patronage of the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall. However, this door remained

closed. This may have been because Bible translation was seen to be closely connected with Lutheranism.

And so in London I abode almost a year, and marked the course of the world...and saw things whereof I defer to speak at this time and understood at the last not only that there was no room in my lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all England, as experience doth now openly declare.

So wrote Tyndale in his prologue to the Pentateuch. (p. 92.) Daniell also brings to light some little known facts regarding the translation of the New Testament into other languages by this time. There had been fourteen identifiable German Bibles over a sixty-year period. The first French version of the New Testament dates from around 1474, with other versions reprinted several times. Italy had considered a printed Bible for some time. In Spain the first Bible had been printed in 1478 and parts appeared in Portuguese before 1500. A Czech New Testament had been produced in 1475 and the Bible in 1488. The Bible in Dutch was printed in 1477. In Scandinavia work was progressing in Swedish and Danish. Yet there was nothing in English. Further, such translation work in England was illegal. Revisionists try to make out a case that, left in quiet, the Roman Catholic Church would have provided such translations and corrected the abuses. However, Daniell's answer is that the Roman Catholic Church failed and shows that the Word of God never was in the hands of the ordinary individual. It is also pointed out that by this date the art of printing in England lagged far behind the continent. It was time for Tyndale to find a more conducive environment for Bible translation, and this he believed he found in Cologne in April, 1525. While in Cologne, Tyndale accepted the offer of assistance of William Roye, an apostate friar from Greenwich. Printing had actually reached Matthew 22 when the translators had to flee the authorities who were on their way to arrest them. At this point Daniell provides some very good analysis of Tyndale's work,

demonstrating how Tyndale had found help in Luther's German translation, using some of Luther's marginal notes and prologue, and following some of his mistakes. The prologue included clear statements of the Gospel, and the marginal notes explained the meaning of words in the text. Tyndale and Roye found shelter in another German city, Worms.

The translation of the New Testament was completed and printed in April, 1526, Daniell suggesting a print run of 3,000 or 6,000. Only two copies exist today, one of which was purchased about ten years ago by the British Museum from Bristol Baptist College for one million pounds (C\$2.4 m.). This was the very first complete translation from the Greek into the common spoken language of England. Daniell is at his very best as he provides numerous examples of Tyndale's genius in understanding the English language. With great insight and understanding of his own, he provides an assessment that impresses upon the reader the enormity of the debt, which we owe to William Tyndale. It is estimated that nine-tenths of the Authorized Version, written eighty-five years later, is the work of Tyndale. "In 1868, Bishop Westcott wrote of Tyndale that, 'His influence decided that our Bible should be popular and not literary, speaking in a simple dialect, and that by its simplicity it should be endowed with permanence.'" (p. 145)

Persecution and Polemics

The third section of the book, "Persecution and Polemics," involves four chapters and covers the years 1526 to 1530, during which time Tyndale wrote and published three major works. The first was *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, a treatise based upon Christ's parable in Luke 16. It is a work setting out the doctrine of justification through faith and not by works according to the New Testament teaching that good works are the result of God's saving grace within the sinner. It was published on May 8, 1528. Daniell provides his typical masterly analysis, emphasizing the clear doctrine of justification by faith and at the same time demonstrating Tyndale's wonderful use of the English language. As was the case with the New Testament, the authorities began seizing and destroying as many copies as

possible. Daniell responds to contemporary Catholic criticism that Tyndale's book was "fierce" in this manner: "We may wonder what is more fierce: printing the New Testament accurately in English, protesting when the Word of God is burned, and setting out the New Testament doctrine of faith with much quotation—or imprisoning, humiliating, repeatedly torturing and finally burning alive men and women." (p. 173.) A long chapter is devoted to the situation in England at that time – the persecution of any possessing New Testaments or parts of them or books deemed heretical or pursuing conduct that was reckoned anti-Catholic, such as failure to observe fast days. No one was spared. Rich and poor, scholar and uneducated, male and female, young and old, all were treated with the utmost severity. Both people and books were burned publicly. Cardinal Wolsey and Bishop Stokesly were the most ruthless. Thomas Cromwell, who would eventually become the most powerful man in England next to the king, did make serious attempts to induce Tyndale to return to England through an English merchant, Stephen Vaughan. Although Vaughan was able to meet with Tyndale on a number of occasions, Tyndale held to the condition, "That is, he will not promise to stop writing books, or return to England until the King grant a vernacular Bible." (p. 217.) On October 2, 1528, another work appeared, also printed in Antwerp, *The Obedience of the Christian Man*. Once again, Daniell demonstrates his skill in commenting on the book as well as his ability to analyze Tyndale's own mastery of the language and most incisive reasoning and logic. The book is an exposition of biblical obedience at all levels of society, including that of the monarch, because of our accountability to God. A further chapter is given to Sir Thomas More, the writer, including brief comment on his writings against Luther and primarily against Tyndale. Tyndale did offer one reply, *Answer*, regarding the issue of faith and works. In his succinct way, Daniell concludes the chapter, "More gave us three quarters of a million words of scarcely readable prose attacking Tyndale. Tyndale outraged More by giving us the Bible in English, England's greatest contribution to the world for nearly five hundred years." (p. 280.)

Hebrew and the Old and New Testaments

Daniell entitles the fourth part of the book, “Hebrew and the Old and New Testaments,” formed by three more chapters. These chapters concern Tyndale’s work in the years 1530 to 1535. In January, 1530, the first copies of Tyndale’s translation of the Pentateuch began to appear. These may have been printed in separate portions; existing copies show different type for different books. Daniell again relishes in the spirit and accuracy of Tyndale’s translation of the Hebrew into everyday English, especially the translator’s skill in communicating the idiom of the original. He states, “Moreover Tyndale discovered that Hebrew goes wonderfully into English—better than into Latin, and better than Latin into English.” (p. 288.) He also points out, “that the interrelation of the Bible books was, for the reformers, an essential part of the reading of Scripture.” (p. 287), hence underlining the need of the entire Bible in the English vernacular. Daniell also argues, “All Old Testament English versions descend from Tyndale; even of the books of the Old Testament which he did not reach. Miles Coverdale, who first gave us printed in English the second half of the Old Testament, had worked with Tyndale, and imitated him.” (p. 289.)

The question is raised as to where Tyndale learned Hebrew, and the only definite answer is that we do not know, other than it was probably somewhere in Germany. Tyndale had made rapid advances in his Hebrew studies, and to aid him in his translation of the Hebrew he would have been able to use Luther’s translation into German, as well as some of Luther’s marginal notes. Whether the two actually met or not is open to discussion, but there is no concrete evidence that indicates that they did. Daniell helps us understand the mind of the translator, “When translating, Tyndale had in mind two principles, it is clear. One was to understand the Hebrew text as well as he possibly could, using whatever helps he could find.... The other was to write something in English that made sense.” (p. 302.) Tyndale himself writes in the prologue, “I perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the Scripture were plainly laid before their

eyes in their mother-tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text.”

While Tyndale continued with his Hebrew studies and translation of the Old Testament, he did not neglect his New Testament studies. In 1534, he published a revision of his New Testament translation of eight years before. There were a number of reasons for a revision. Firstly, a pirated edition published by George Joye had appeared in which he made a number of changes in the text, without consulting Tyndale nor securing his permission. Secondly, by now Tyndale had a much better grasp of New Testament Greek, and his understanding of the many Old Testament references in the New Testament has been greatly enlarged through his Old Testament studies. Many historians are critical of Tyndale’s work, saying his marginal notes are inflammatory. The notes are nothing more than cross-references, alternative readings, or of an expository nature. Daniell indicates that they are simply helps and explanations of what the text is saying. The authorities found Tyndale’s use of the word ‘repentance’ instead of ‘do penance’, ‘elder’ instead of ‘priest’, ‘congregation’ instead of ‘church’, etc., highly offensive, but they were stumbling over what is true. Daniell’s final word on the revision is, “It is the New Testament, as English speakers have known it until the last few decades of the twentieth century.” (p. 331.) It was during this period that Tyndale wrote to his friend John Frith, “I call to God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus Christ, to give a reckoning of our doings, that I never altered one syllable of God’s word against my conscience, nor would this day, if all that is in the earth, whether it be pleasure, honour, or riches, might be given me.”

Daniell now takes the reader on to 1537 to show the connection between Tyndale’s Old Testament translation work and the publication that year of what was known as Matthew’s Bible, probably printed in Antwerp, Coverdale’s Bible having appeared two years before. Although published under the name of Matthew, this Bible was reckoned to be the work of John Rogers, a friend and assistant to Tyndale while he worked in Antwerp. When Tyndale was arrested in 1535, Rogers took

charge of the manuscripts that Tyndale was preparing for the press. Daniell argues convincingly that Rogers acted as editor, using Tyndale's Old Testament translation, Coverdale's for the sections not dealt with by Tyndale, and then Tyndale's revised New Testament. The Bible was dedicated to the king. It was this very version, basically that of Tyndale, that, on the advice of Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, King Henry VIII, authorized for public sale and ordered a copy to be placed in all churches! This was the fulfillment of Tyndale's desire for the ploughboy, accessibility to the Word of God in the English vernacular. The style of Matthews's Bible is typical Tyndale for, "One key to Tyndale's genius is that his ear for how the people spoke was so good. The English he was using was not the language of the scribe or lawyer or schoolmaster; it really was, at base, the spoken language of the people." (p. 356.)

The fifth and final section of two chapters is entitled, "Martyr". In the early part of 1535, Tyndale was living in the home of Thomas Poyntz, an English merchant in Antwerp. Here he would have continued his work of translating the Old Testament. However, this was a time when it was not advantageous to be English while living on the Continent. Just twenty-four miles away at the court in Brussels, Emperor Charles' power was felt and his open hostility towards Henry VIII was imitated. While Antwerp was safe, it was surrounded by hostile territory. Sometime in the spring of 1535, the Englishman Henry Phillips appeared in nearby Louvain. Although from a good family and a graduate in civil law, Phillips formerly disgraced himself, but now he had money. Phillips detested Henry, talked publicly, and became known among the English merchants as a traitor and rebel. But he was a man with a mission, to betray William Tyndale. Daniell carefully unfolds the events and the manner in which Phillips, posing as a friend, obtained the confidence of Tyndale, planned the trap, and then led Tyndale right into the hands of the authorities. "Tyndale was arrested on or near May 21, 1535" and taken to "Vilvorde castle six miles north of Brussels". (p. 364.)

The English merchants acted immediately upon hearing of the arrest. Letters were written to Thomas Cromwell and also Cranmer in England, but it was a difficult time because of the tensions created over the divorce issue. Thomas Poyntz was the chief carrier of letters to the authorities in Brussels, but Phillips also betrayed him to the authorities. Poyntz, having been arrested and imprisoned for three months, did manage to escape. However, his business was ruined, and he eventually died a poor man in England, even abandoned by his wife.



Tyndale imprisoned at Vilvorde castle

Daniell raises the question as to who was behind Phillips? Although there is no direct evidence, Stokesley, Bishop of London, is the most probable as he was such a hater of the reformers and all heretics, even boasting on his death bed of those whom he had destroyed. Phillips, disowned by his parents, shunned by everyone and trusted by no one, maintained total secrecy. In the final chapter, Daniell traces the eventual trial of Tyndale and his execution. He was kept in prison for almost seventeen months. During this period Tyndale was confronted by a variety of scholars, theologians and friars, but it was a body of seventeen commissioners who actually tried him and pronounced him a heretic. Tyndale wrote several books defending his position on biblical grounds during this period and answers were penned to try and refute him. Unfortunately, none of Tyndale's work was preserved by the authorities for some reason! But a letter written in Latin and hidden for three hundred years was discovered. Daniell provides the English translation given by Mozley,

I believe, right worshipful that you are not unaware of what may have been determined concerning me. Wherefore I beg your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here through the winter, you will request the commissary to have the kindness to send to me, from the goods of mine which he has, a warmer cap; for I suffer greatly from cold in the head, and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh, which is much increased in this cell; a warmer coat also, for this which I have is very thin; a piece of cloth too to patch my leggings. My overcoat is worn out; my shirts are also worn out. He has a woollen shirt, if he will be good enough to send it. I have also with him leggings of thicker cloth to put on above; he also has warmer night-caps. And I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening; it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent

with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study. In return may you obtain what you most desire, so only that it be for the salvation of your soul. But if any other decision has been taken concerning me, to be carried out before winter, I will be patient, abiding in the will of God, to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ: whose Spirit (I pray) may ever direct your heart. Amen. W. Tindalus. (p. 379.)

Daniell gives Mozley's comment, "A noble dignity and independence breathe through it. There is no touch of flattery, much less of cringing, yet it is perfectly courteous and respectful. Tyndale accepts his present plight with an equal mind, though he will lighten the burden as far as he can. But through it all, his chief thought is for the gospel which is committed to him." (p. 380.) John Foxe wrote of the impact of Tyndale's life, also quoted by Daniell, "Such was the power of his doctrine, and the sincerity of his life, that during time of his imprisonment, (which endured a year and a half), it is said, he converted his keeper, the keeper's daughter, and others of the household. Also the rest that were with Tyndale conversant in the castle, reported of him, that if he were not a good Christian man, they could not tell whom to trust." (p. 381.) Eventually, in August, 1536, William Tyndale was condemned as a heretic. Before he was put to death he was degraded from the priesthood publicly. "Two months after the degradation, early in the morning of one of the first days of October, 1536, Tyndale was executed." (p. 382.) A large crowd gathered at the place of execution, the commissioners seated themselves in the front, the prisoner was brought out, called upon to recant, and allowed a moment to pray. He was then chained to a large wooden cross, a noose placed around his neck, and at the given signal the executioner suddenly tightened the rope, strangling Tyndale to death. As soon as it was certain that he was dead, the straw and brushwood were torched and his body burned. But in the last moment of life, Tyndale had called upon

God in heaven in a loud voice, saying, “Lord! Open the king of England’s eyes.”

Lessons for today to be learned from the life of William Tyndale.

1. The importance of making available the Word of God to the ordinary person. Tyndale had a burning conviction that it was absolutely vital for the common person to be exposed to the Word of God, otherwise total ignorance would prevail. Only the Word of God could dispel that darkness. Tyndale was so committed to this matter that he was prepared to forsake his native England and live as a fugitive in order to achieve this goal.
2. It is also clear that Tyndale did not think it sufficient to simply place copies of the Word of God in the hands of the people. The Word must be declared in intelligent and every day language. Tyndale, when he had opportunity, preached in Gloucestershire and London. He wrote books and he included marginal notes in his translations to explain the text. Today the Christian church needs preachers to expound the text accurately and with all due application in a lively manner, and not entertainment or mere religious experience. We are required to bring people under the sound of such ministry in public services and Bible studies.
3. As we consider the life of Tyndale, we are reminded of the utmost dedication and single mindedness that he brought to translating the Word of God. How he achieved all that he did is quite extraordinary. Obviously he was a genius in the field of linguistics and communication. He had minimal helps, everything having to be written by hand, in the most humble of circumstances, and lacking so much of what we would consider to be basic needs.
4. Tyndale discerned the need of the people of England, anticipating that the Word of God would be welcomed and read by the common people. If we believe that in our day such a desire is absent, then it is incumbent upon us that we pray for such conditions through the gracious and sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. How much do we ourselves actually

- treasure the Word of God, realizing what price has been paid to give us this Word in our own language?
5. In translating the Word of God, Tyndale endeavoured to render the original text and its spirit as accurately as possible. However, he never gave the impression that he had achieved the ultimate translation, but instead he would revise, aiming constantly at improvement and greater accuracy. Therefore, his translation is not wooden but gripping, full of graphic words, rhythmic, readable and intelligible. For Tyndale, nothing less than excellence was sufficient in order to glorify the God of infinite perfections who has manifested himself through his Word.
 6. David Daniell has produced a biography of outstanding quality and, for anyone interested in understanding the origin of the English Bible and the man who gave us that Bible, this is the book to read. This book should be required reading for all pastors, missionaries, and especially Bible translators working in any language.

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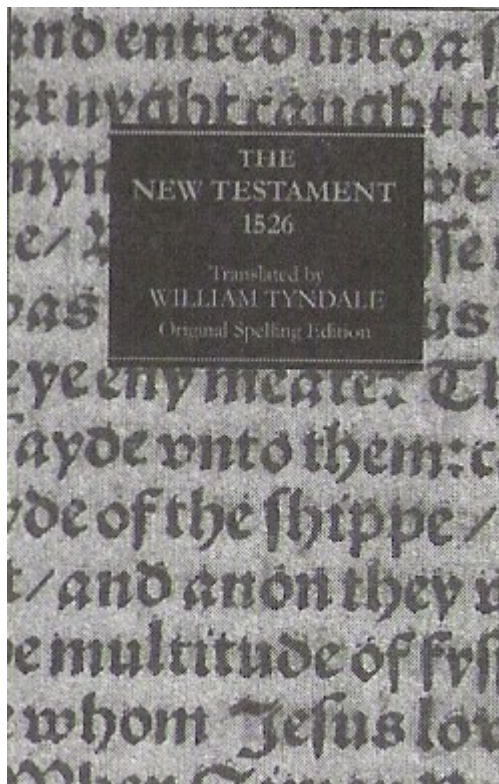
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Tyndale Bible



The New Testament 1526, trans. William Tyndale, transcription W. Cooper, intro. David Daniell, ed. William Cooper. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). 544 pp. hc. ISBN 0-7123-4664-3.