

HEROES OF THE CHURCH: William Tyndale



“William Tyndale gave us our English Bible.” - Biographer David Daniell

I. Brief History of the English Bible

- Original writers of Bible produce manuscripts (~1500 BC-96 AD).
- As early as 2nd century, copies made into different languages (Coptic, Syriac, Gothic, Latin).
- Most famous translation was Jerome’s Latin *Vulgate* (400 AD), carried to England from Rome in 6th century.
- As monasteries grow, various monks and churchmen translate portions from Latin into English.
- John Wyclif (1329-1384) and followers translate entire Bible from Latin into English:

“In the bigynnyng was the word, and the word was at God, and God was the word. This was in the bigynnyng at God. Alle thingis weren maad bi hym, and withouten hym was maad no thing, that thing that was maad. In hym was lijf, and the lijf was the liyt of men; and the liyt schyneth in derknessis, and derknessis comprehendiden not it.” (Purvey’s revision of Wyclif Bible in Middle English, 1388)

- The Renaissance leads to first Greek New Testament publication by Dutch Catholic Erasmus in 1516.

“Christ wishes his mysteries to be published as widely as possible. I would wish...that the husbandman may sing parts of them at his plow, that the weaver may warble them at his shuttle, that the traveler may with their narratives beguile the weariness of the way.” - Preface to Erasmus’ Greek New Testament.

II. The Arrival of William Tyndale

- Born in Gloucestershire, England, (c. 1494).
- By 22, worked as tutor in home of Sir John Walsh by 1522.

“I defy the Pope and all his laws...If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.” - William Tyndale, before leaving England

- Providential and indirect training by Erasmus’ *De Copia* on writing style (One lesson: Give “no fewer than one hundred fifty ways of saying ‘Your letter has delighted me very much’”).
- Under pressure from the Catholic church, Tyndale fled England, never to return.
- Tyndale translated the Greek New Testament in 1526. Three-thousand copies smuggled into England.

III. The Impact of Tyndale’s Translation

- A sample of the Bible vocabulary we owe to Tyndale:
 - “Let there be light” (Gen 1:1)
 - “The signs of the times” (Matt 16:3)
 - “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9)
 - “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41)
 - “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Matt 6:9)
 - “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9)
 - “He went out...and wept bitterly” (Matt 26:75)
 - “Fight the good fight” (1 Tim 6:12)

IV. Why the Passion for Translation?

A. Tyndale was serious enough about the Gospel to speak clearly about it.

“Evangelion (that we call the gospel) is a Greek word and signifieth good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that maketh a man's heart glad and maketh him sing, dance, and leap for joy. . . . [This gospel is] all of Christ, the right David, how that he hath fought with sin, with death, and the devil, and overcome them: whereby all men that were in bondage to sin, wounded with death, overcome of the devil are without their own merits or deservings loosed, justified, restored to life and saved, brought to liberty and reconciled unto the favor of God and set at one with him again: which tidings as many as believe laud, praise and thank God, are glad, sing and dance for joy.” - Tyndale, *Selected Writings*, 33.

“Bible translation and Bible truth were inseparable for Tyndale.” - John Piper

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospell of Christ because it is the power of God vnto salvacion to all that beleve namely to the Iewe and also to the getyle.” For by it the rightewesnes which cometh of god is opened from fayth to fayth. As it is written: The iust shall live by fayth.” (Rom 1:16-17, from 1534 Tyndale Bible)

V. Why the Opposition Against Tyndale’s Translation?

- A. 1401 – Parliament passes *de Haeretico Comburendo* (‘On the Burning of Heretics’)
- B. 1408 – Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundell forbids reading English Bibles.
1. John Foxe records 11 followers of Wycliff burned at Coventry in 1519 for teaching their children the Lord’s Prayer in English.
 2. John Firth, closest friend of Tyndale, arrested and burned at stake July 4, 1533, at age 28.
 3. Richard Bayfield, ship captain for smuggling Tyndale Bibles, burned in Smythfelde in 1531.
- C. Surface reasons for opposition:
1. English too unworthy for God’s Word.
 2. Errors can creep in and/or people can go astray without priestly grace to guide them.
 3. There is a special sacramental value in the Latin mass, even though people can’t understand it.
- D. Deeper reasons for opposition:
1. Certain RC doctrines would not be sustained.
 2. Church power over the people would be lost.

VI. Tyndale’s Life for the English Bible – Last words: “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!”



“Your cause is Christ’s gospel, a light that must be fed with the blood of faith. . . . If when we be buffeted for well-doing, we suffer patiently and endure, that is thankful with God; for to that end we are called. For Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, who did no sin. Hereby have we perceived love that he laid down his life for us: therefore we ought to be able to lay down our lives for the brethren. . . . Let not your body faint. If the pain be above your strength, remember: “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will give it you.” And pray to our Father in that name, and he will ease your pain, or shorten it. . . . Amen.”

- Tyndale to John Frith just before Frith’s death, 1533.