

WILLIAM TYNDALE: THE FATHER OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

By Dr. Lonnie Shipman

While conversing with local clergy, Tyndale was shocked to find their ignorance of the Bible. One minister said, "We were better before without God's law than the Pope's." Tyndale replied, "I defy the Pope and all his laws, if God spare my life, ere many years I will cause the boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

Born as William Hutchins (Tyndale) near the Welsh border in Gloucestershire in 1494, his father revealed his real last name on his deathbed (which had been temporarily changed for political reasons). Tyndale graduated from Oxford with his M.A. in 1515 and moved to Cambridge to study the Bible and Greek. While there he joined the Bible study at White Horse Inn with Bilney, Clark, Lambert, Barnes, Frith, Ridley and Latimer (a veritable Who's Who of the English Reformation). He was deeply impressed in the authority of the Word of God and justification by faith alone. While preaching in London, Tyndale said, "It is the blood of Christ that opens the gates of Heaven, and not thy works."

After a short time as tutor and chaplain for the John Walsh family, William felt the call to translate the Bible into English. While seeking ecclesiastical approval from the Bishop of London his request was denied and Tyndale resolved to leave England to pursue his venture.

In early 1524 he went to Wittenberg, Germany, and registered in the University under the alias Daltin (the reverse of Tyndale). There he had special meetings with Martin Luther and finished his New Testament in just over a year! Finding a printer was a difficult task, as he traveled to Hamburg, then to Cologne. Soon the pages began to roll off the press but one assistant spoke too freely over wine and English spies came to raid the printing. Just moments before, Tyndale was warned and he escaped with the printed sheets! The edition was soon completed in Worms in December 1525. Although 6,000 Testaments were printed and smuggled to England in bales of cloth and boxes of wheat, the fires of persecution burned so many that only one of that first edition survives today. Yet, even here God's hand was at work. The bishop of London approached a friend of Tyndale's to buy his Bibles for public burning. This friend arranged to sell all Tyndale's Bibles to the bishop for a high price (yet for each Bible they purchased to burn, money was secretly paid to Tyndale to print four more!).

Next in Marburg from 1527 to 1529, Tyndale mastered Hebrew, and translated the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) into English. Traveling by sea to Hamburg his ship was wrecked on the Holland coast and he lost all his manuscripts, money and possessions. But by January 1530 his Pentateuch was ready to be published and he went to Antwerp for printing. Work on the Old Testament progressed and Tyndale probably finished the books of Joshua through the Chronicles and Jonah, which were left in the capable hands of John Rogers (who later published them in the Matthew's Bible).

However, Tyndale was betrayed by a friend in 1535 and imprisoned at Vilvorde castle, near Brussels. Over a year after his trial, Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake. Just before death, Tyndale shouted: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

God answered his prayer and in just four years the king authorized the publishing of the Great Bible to be placed in every church in England (a Bible that was virtually Tyndale's translation unchanged). And today over ninety percent of the magnificent Authorized King James Version retains the text of William Tyndale.

—The Biblical Evangelist

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