

William Tyndale, God's Outlaw

It is hard for us today to imagine not having a Bible in our own language, but it hasn't always been that way. When William Tyndale was a little boy growing up in England in the 1500s, ordinary people did not own Bibles. They had to go to church to hear what the Bible had to say. But there was one problem the priest read the Bible in Latin, a language only the most educated people could understand.

As William Tyndale grew older and finished college, he felt that God was calling him to translate the Bible into English so that all people could read it for themselves. But believe it or not translating the Bible was against the law. Like many others during his time, William Tyndale was called a false teacher and was put to death for his beliefs. Based on historical sources, this is his story as he might have told it.

My Gift for Languages Lets Me Read the Bible for Myself I grew up on a farm in Gloucestershire, England. Life was very difficult for English families. Children worked very hard to help their parents. Disease and famine often killed thousands at a time.

My parents could tell early in my life that I had a gift for learning languages. I was able to go to Oxford University, one of England's finest schools. By the time I graduated, I had mastered SEVEN languages! Of them, Hebrew and Greek were most useful to me, because I could now read the Bible in its original languages.

I learned so much about God as I read the Bible for myself! I knew I had to use the gift God had given me so that others could read the Bible for themselves, too! I was well aware that translating the Scriptures was against the law and could cost me my life, but how could I not do what God was calling me to do?

Church and King Try to Keep Me Quiet At first I asked the Church authorities for permission to translate the Bible into English. The answer was no. The Church believed that only the Pope and priests were educated enough to truly understand and interpret the Bible.

One day a discussion with a priest became a heated argument when he told me that it was better to be without God's laws than the Pope's. I could not believe what I was hearing! I answered him by saying, "I defy the Pope and all his laws; if God spares my life, I will cause a young farm boy to know more of the Scriptures than you do."

I also did not agree with the Church's teaching that doing good things was the way to get to heaven. The Bible clearly says that salvation is a free gift from God for those who believe. Many in the Catholic Church and also the King of England, Henry VIII, looked for ways to keep me quiet.

Hiding from Spies I knew I must leave England immediately. I secretly traveled to Germany, where others had also taken a stand against some of the Church's teachings. When I arrived, I quickly changed my name so no one would be able to find me and began my work.

Translating the Bible into English was a difficult job. Each word had to be recorded correctly. The language also had to be simple enough for even an uneducated person to understand. It took more than a year for me to complete the New Testament translation.

I had to find a good printer whom I could also trust to keep my whereabouts secret. I could not risk being caught. English spies would be paid well to turn me in. One spy eventually did find out where the first printing was taking place. I narrowly escaped capture, getting away just in time with some of my materials!

The English Bible on English Soil Once the printing was completed, copies had to get into England without being seized. Smugglers hid the Bibles in shipments where no one expected them: in flour barrels, in trunks with false bottoms, and in airtight boxes inside wine barrels.

The Bibles sold as quickly as they reached England, even though one cost about half a week's earnings (over \$100 in today's dollars). Families saved and put their money together, and a farmer would trade an entire load of hay to get just one Bible. Groups would meet together to hear the Word of God for the first time in their own language.

The religious leaders and the King were furious! They tried to destroy as many copies as they could. They also intensified their search to find and arrest me.

A "Friend" Turns Me Over to Killers I had begun to feel quite safe in Germany. I had also become somewhat of a celebrity. But I let nothing get in the way of completing my task. I worked late every night translating several books of the Old Testament.

One day I met a young Englishman in Germany who seemed to share my ideas about the need to translate the Bible. Over time we became good friends. What I didn't know was that this young man was a spy who would soon betray me. He led me right into the hands of my captors, after inviting me out for a meal. I was jailed, charged with heresy (false teaching), and sentenced to death by burning.

PostScript The last thing we know about William Tyndale is that he was led through a crowd into the public square. A noose was placed around his neck. His last words were, "God, please open the King of England's eyes." He was then hanged and his body was set afire.

God answered his prayer in a wonderful way. Within one year of William Tyndale's death, the King of England gave approval for an English Bible to be published. Tyndale's Bible was used as a guide for the new translation. This new translation is the father of the King James Bible that is still read today.