

The English Bible



**History of the English Bible
from the beginning up
through the most printed
translation in the world, the King
James Bible – 1611 with major
revision in 1769**



WYCLIFF

The first English language Bible manuscripts were hand-written in the 1380's AD by John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor, scholar, and theologian. Wycliffe, (also spelled "Wycliff" & "Wyclif"), was well-known throughout Europe for his opposition to the teaching of the organized Church, which he believed to be contrary to the Bible.

With the help of his followers, called the Lollards, and his assistant Purvey, and many other faithful scribes, Wycliffe produced dozens of English language manuscript copies of the scriptures. They were translated out of the Latin Vulgate, which was the only source text available to Wycliffe.

The Pope was so infuriated by his teachings and his translation of the Bible into English, that 44 years after Wycliffe had died, he ordered the bones to be dug-up, crushed, and scattered in the river!



HUS

One of Wycliffe's followers, John Hus, actively promoted Wycliffe's ideas: that people should be permitted to read the Bible in their own language, and they should oppose the tyranny of the Roman church that threatened anyone possessing a non-Latin Bible with execution.

Hus was burned at the stake in 1415, with Wycliffe's manuscript Bibles used as kindling for the fire. The last recorded words of John Hus were that, "in 100 years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed."

Almost exactly 100 years later, in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses of Contention (with the Roman Catholic Church) into the church door at Wittenberg.



COLET

In 1496, John Colet, another Oxford professor and the son of the Mayor of London, started reading the New Testament in Greek and translating it into English for his students at Oxford, and later for the public at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London.

The people were so hungry to hear the Word of God in a language they could understand, that within six months there were 20,000 people packed in the church and at least that many outside trying to get in! *(Sadly, while the enormous and beautiful Saint Paul's Cathedral remains the main church in London today, as of 2003, typical Sunday morning worship attendance is only around 200 people... and most of them are tourists).*

Fortunately for Colet, he was a powerful man with friends in high places, so he amazingly managed to avoid execution.



William Tyndale was the Captain of the Army of Reformers, and was their spiritual leader. Tyndale holds the distinction of being the first man to ever print the New Testament in the English language. Tyndale was a true scholar and a genius, so fluent in eight languages that it was said one would think any one of them to be his native tongue. He is frequently referred to as the "Architect of the English Language", (even more so than William Shakespeare) as so many of the phrases Tyndale coined are still in our language today.

William Tyndale (1494-1536) Biblical translator and martyr; born most probably at North Nibley (15 miles south-west of Gloucester), England, in 1494; died at Vilvoorden (6 miles north-east of Brussels), Belgium, Oct. 6, 1536. Tyndale was descended from an ancient Northumbrian family, went to school at Oxford, and afterward to Magdalen Hall and Cambridge.

Tyndale was a theologian and scholar who translated the Bible into an early form of Modern English. He was the first person to take advantage of Gutenberg's movable-type press for the purpose of printing the scriptures in the English language.

Besides translating the Bible, Tyndale also held and published views which were considered heretical, first by the Catholic Church, and later by the Church of England which was established by Henry VIII. His Bible translation also included notes and commentary promoting these views. Tyndale's translation was banned by the authorities, and Tyndale himself was burned at the stake in 1536, at the instigation of agents of Henry VIII and the Anglican Church.

Tyndale was betrayed by a friend, Philips, the agent either of Henry or of English ecclesiastics, or possibly of both. Tyndale was arrested and imprisoned in the castle of Vilvoorden for over 500 days of horrible conditions. He was tried for heresy and treason in a ridiculously unfair trial, and convicted. Tyndale was then strangled and burnt at the stake in the prison yard, Oct. 6, 1536. His last words were, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes." This prayer was answered three years later, in the publication of King Henry VIII's 1539 English "Great Bible".

TYNDALE

Tyndale had been forced to flee England, because of the wide-spread rumor that his English New Testament project was underway, causing inquisitors and bounty hunters to be constantly on Tyndale's trail to arrest him and prevent his project. God foiled their plans, and in 1525-1526 the Tyndale New Testament became the first printed edition of the scripture in the English language. Subsequent printings of the Tyndale New Testament in the 1530's were often elaborately illustrated.

They were burned as soon as the Bishop could confiscate them, but copies trickled through and actually ended up in the bedroom of King Henry VIII. The more the King and Bishop resisted its distribution, the more fascinated the public at large became. The church declared it contained thousands of errors as they torched hundreds of New Testaments confiscated by the clergy, while in fact, they burned them because they could find no errors at all. One risked death by burning if caught in mere possession of Tyndale's forbidden books.



Having God's Word available to the public in the language of the common man, English, would have meant disaster to the church. No longer would they control access to the scriptures. If people were able to read the Bible in their own tongue, the church's income and power would crumble. They could not possibly continue to get away with selling indulgences (the forgiveness of sins) or selling the release of loved ones from a church-manufactured "Purgatory". People would begin to challenge the church's authority if the church were exposed as frauds and thieves. The contradictions between what God's Word said, and what the priests taught, would open the public's eyes and the truth would set them free from the grip of fear that the institutional church held. Salvation through faith, not works or donations, would be understood. The need for priests would vanish through the priesthood of all believers. The veneration of church-canonized Saints and Mary would be called into question. The availability of the scriptures in English was the biggest threat imaginable to the wicked church. Neither side would give up without a fight.

Today, there are only two known copies left of Tyndale's 1525-26 First Edition. Any copies printed prior to 1570 are extremely valuable. Tyndale's flight was an inspiration to freedom-loving Englishmen who drew courage from the 11 years that he was hunted. Books and Bibles flowed into England in bales of cotton and sacks of flour. Ironically, Tyndale's biggest customer was the King's men, who would buy up every copy available to burn them... and Tyndale used their money to print even more! In the end, Tyndale was caught: betrayed by an Englishman that he had befriended.

TYNDALE



Myles Coverdale and John “Thomas Matthew” Rogers had remained loyal disciples the last six years of Tyndale's life, and they carried the English Bible project forward and even accelerated it.

Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament, and in 1535 he printed the first complete Bible in the English language, making use of Luther's German text and the Latin as sources.

Thus, the first complete English Bible was printed on October 4, 1535, and is known as the **Coverdale Bible**.

COVERDALE



ROGERS

John Rogers went on to print the second complete English Bible in 1537.

It was, however, ***the first English Bible translated from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew & Greek.***

He printed it under the pseudonym "Thomas Matthew", (an assumed name that had actually been used by Tyndale at one time) as a considerable part of this Bible was the translation of Tyndale, whose writings had been condemned by the English authorities.

It is a composite made up of Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament (1534-1535 edition) and Coverdale's Bible and some of Roger's own translation of the text.

It remains known most commonly as the Matthew-Tyndale Bible. It went through a nearly identical second-edition printing in 1549.



CRANMER



COVERDALE

In 1539, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the bequest of King Henry VIII to publish the "**Great Bible**".

It became the first English Bible authorized for public use, as it was distributed to every church, chained to the pulpit, and a reader was even provided so that the illiterate could hear the Word of God in plain English.

It would seem that William Tyndale's last wish had been granted...just three years after his martyrdom. Cranmer's Bible, published by Coverdale, was known as the Great Bible due to its great size: a large pulpit folio measuring over 14 inches tall. Seven editions of this version were printed between April of 1539 and December of 1541.

This was King Henry VIII's first act to further defy the wishes of Rome by funding the printing of the scriptures in English... the first legal English Bible... just for spite.



QUEEN “BLOODY” MARY

The ebb and flow of freedom continued through the 1540's...and into the 1550's. After King Henry VIII, King Edward VI took the throne, and after his death, the reign of Queen “Bloody” Mary was the next obstacle to the printing of the Bible in English.

She was possessed in her quest to return England to the Roman Church. In 1555, John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers and Thomas Cranmer were both burned at the stake. Mary went on to burn reformers at the stake by the hundreds for the "crime" of being a Protestant.

This era was known as the Marian Exile, and the refugees fled from England with little hope of ever seeing their home or friends again.

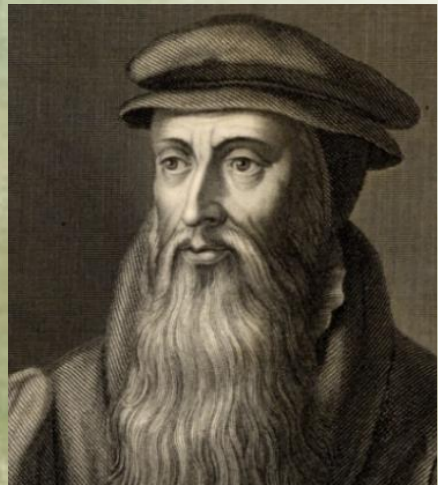
During their exile, they produced the famous 1560 Geneva Bible which was "The Bible of the Protestant Reformation", from which many home-schooled their children.



John Foxe



Myles Coverdale



John Knox



John Calvin

In the 1550's, the Church at Geneva, Switzerland, was very sympathetic to the reformer refugees and was one of only a few safe havens for a desperate people. Many of them met in Geneva, led by Myles Coverdale and John Foxe (publisher of the famous Foxe's Book of Martyrs, which is to this day the only exhaustive reference work on the persecution and martyrdom of Early Christians and Protestants from the first century up to the mid-16th century), as well as Thomas Sampson and William Whittingham. There, with the protection of the great theologian John Calvin (author of the most famous theological book ever published, Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion) and John Knox, the great Reformer of the Scottish Church, the Church of Geneva determined to produce a Bible that would educate their families while they continued in exile.

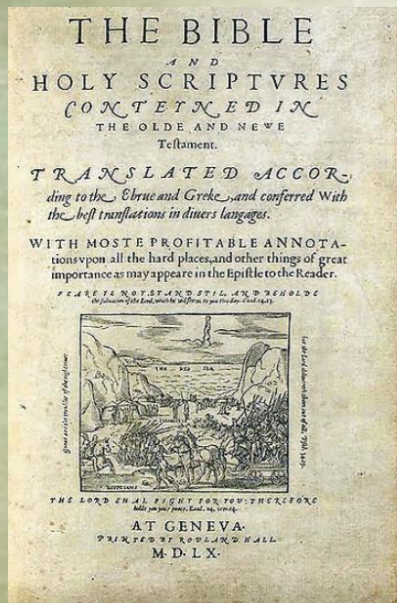
The New Testament was completed in 1557, and the complete Bible was first published in 1560. It became known as the Geneva Bible. Due to a passage in Genesis describing the clothing that God fashioned for Adam and Eve upon expulsion from the Garden of Eden as "Breeches" (an antiquated form of "Britches"), some people referred to the Geneva Bible as the Breeches Bible.

The Geneva Bible was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters, so that referencing specific passages would be easier. Every chapter was also accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references so thorough and complete that the Geneva Bible is also considered the first English "Study Bible". William Shakespeare quotes hundreds of times in his plays from the Geneva translation of the Bible. *The Geneva Bible became the Bible of choice for over 100 years of English speaking Christians. Between 1560 and 1644 at least 144 editions of this Bible were published. Examination of the 1611 King James Bible shows clearly that its translators were influenced much more by the Geneva Bible, than by any other source. The Geneva Bible itself retains over 90% of William Tyndale's original English translation. The Geneva in fact, remained more popular than the King James Version until decades after its original release in 1611!* The Geneva holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America, and the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims. It is truly the "Bible of the Protestant Reformation."



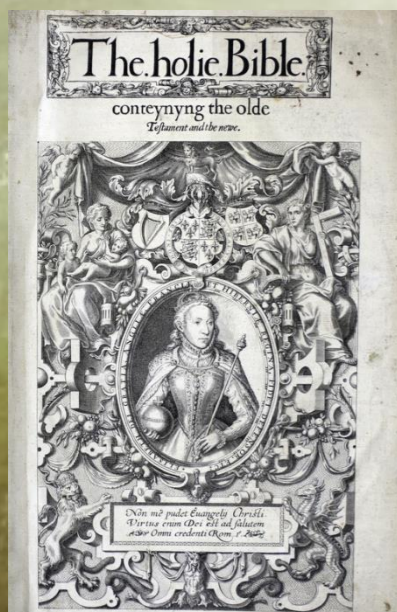
The Great Bible,
the first Legal
printing of an
English Bible under
King Henry VIII

1539



The Geneva Bible
the product of
Marian exile
Reformers (and the
first Bible brought
to America)

1560



The Bishop's Bible,
a revision of the
Great Bible printed
under Queen
Elizabeth I
(preceding the KJV)

1568

With the end of Queen Mary's bloody reign, the reformers could safely return to England. The Anglican Church, now under Queen Elizabeth I, reluctantly tolerated the printing and distribution of Geneva version Bibles in England.

The marginal notes, which were vehemently against the institutional Church of the day, did not rest well with the rulers of the day. Another version, one with a less inflammatory tone was desired, and the copies of the Great Bible were getting to be decades old. In 1568, a revision of the Great Bible known as the Bishop's Bible was introduced.

Despite 19 editions being printed between 1568 and 1606, this Bible, referred to as the "rough draft of the King James Version", never gained much of a foothold of popularity among the people. The Geneva may have simply been too much to compete with.



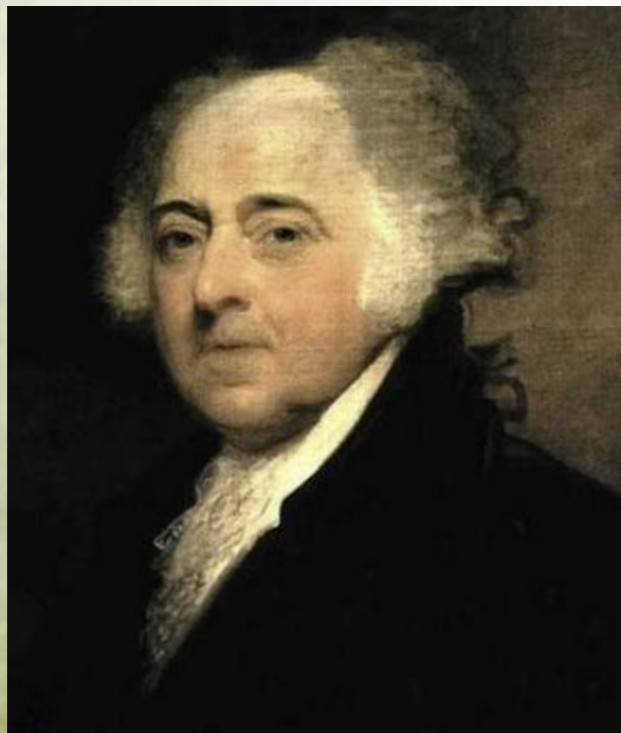
With the death of Queen Elizabeth I, Prince James VI of Scotland became King James I of England. The Protestant clergy approached the new King in 1604 and announced their desire for a new translation to replace the Bishop's Bible first printed in 1568. They knew that the Geneva Version had won the hearts of the people because of its excellent scholarship, accuracy, and exhaustive commentary. However, they did not want the controversial marginal notes (proclaiming the Pope an Anti-Christ, etc.) Essentially, the leaders of the church desired a Bible for the people, with scriptural references only for word clarification or cross-references.

This "translation to end all translations" (for a while at least) was the result of the combined effort of about fifty scholars. They took into consideration: The Tyndale New Testament, The Coverdale Bible, The Matthews Bible, The Great Bible, The Geneva Bible, and even the Rheims New Testament. The great revision of the Bishop's Bible had begun. From 1605 to 1606 the scholars engaged in private research. From 1607 to 1609 the work was assembled. In 1610 the work went to press, and in 1611 the first of the huge (16 inch tall) pulpit folios known today as "The 1611 King James Bible" came off the printing press. A typographical discrepancy in Ruth 3:15 rendered a pronoun "He" instead of "She" in that verse in some printings. This caused some of the 1611 First Editions to be known by collectors as "He" Bibles, and others as "She" Bibles.

KING JAMES



Robert Aitken had immigrated from Dalkeith in Scotland in 1769 to settle in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There, he opened a bookshop and also began publication of “The Pennsylvania Magazine” to which Thomas Paine often contributed. By 1776, Robert Aitken was the official printer of the Journals of Congress for the United States Congress. Aitken was a bold patriot, and it disturbed him greatly to see his country without copies of the scripture. In 1771, he produced the first English language New Testament printed in America. It was eagerly received, and went through a second edition printing in 1778, a third in 1779, a fourth in 1780, and a fifth in 1781.



On January 21, 1781, Robert Aitken petitioned the United States Congress to authorize, and if possible even fund, the printing of a complete Bible in the English language of the King James Version. On September 10, 1782, Aitken received authorization from the United States Congress to commence his American printing of the Bible in English. This is the only instance in history of the U.S. Congress authorizing the printing of a Bible. In subsequent years, that session was often mockingly referred to as “The Bible Congress.” Thus, in 1782, Robert Aitken produced the first English language Bible printed in America. In 1783, George Washington wrote a letter commending Robert Aitken for his Bible. The Robert Aitken Bible is known as the “Bible of the American Revolution” and it remains the most rare and valuable of early American English Bibles.

AIKEN