



WILLIAM TYNDALE

During the heart of the Protestant Reformation, the Lord by divine providence, raised up a man whose work would help reshape the very foundations of the western world. His name was William Tyndale. Over one hundred years before his birth, God anointed John Wycliffe, known as the "Morning Star of the Reformation" to awaken the people of England to the truths of the Bible that had been hid from them for so long. He began the work of Bible translation, the examination of many Roman dogmas and sent out "poor priests" known as Lollards to preach throughout the country the good news of salvation by grace. His work was the 'breaking of the dawn' of Gospel light over the people of Britain, while the work of Tyndale would bring about that light as strong as the noon-day sun.

Tyndale was born in c. 1494, most likely at North Nibley in Gloucestershire, England of Northumbrian ancestry. He attended Oxford and Cambridge and received an education that would later be used of God to translate the Bible in the common language of the people. He entered Oxford University at nine years old and received his Master's Degree at twenty-one years old. While at the Universities, he became very proficient in the Greek language which enabled him to study the Greek New Testament of Erasmus. He proved to be a very gifted linguist and could read and speak fluently in eight languages; Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, German and his native English. Tyndale was blessed with an amiable personality and was always known for living a disciplined and virtuous life.

In his studies, Tyndale became an erudite theologian and began to publish religious views which were considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church and later by the Church of England. While a tutor in the family of Sir John Walsh, c. 1520, he encountered much opposition to his preaching from the Roman Catholic dignitaries which resulted in his transfer to London, c. 1523. His continual espousal of the tenets of Martin Luther and the Reformation ostracized him from church leaders, but made him friends among the laity. Once when conversing with Tyndale, a papal priest infuriated him by saying; "we are better to be without God's laws than the Pope's." With a determined and fervent spirit Tyndale retorted; "I defy the pope and all his laws. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than you!"

He first began to translate the New Testament, but soon discovered that it was too risky to do so in England. He went to Germany in about 1524. His first attempt of printing his translation was in Cologne, but soldiers of the Holy Roman Empire raided the print shop. He fled with as many pages as he could and went to Worms. His New Testament translation was printed in Worms, Germany in 1525-26 and copies of it was smuggled back into England in bales of cotton. He was the first Bible translator to have copies of his work printed on the Gutenberg press. The timing of the invention of the printing press in 1450 by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany was nothing less than God's perfect plan for His people Israel to once again receive His Word for their deliverance from spiritual bondage.

The Tyndale Bibles which made it into England were sought out and ceremonially burned. The Archbishop of Canterbury launched a campaign to buy up copies of the Bible in order to destroy them by fire. His translation of the five books of Moses was printed in Holland in 1530. In addition to his Bible translations, he wrote; "The Obedience of a Christian" which was read by Ann Boleyn and favorably impressed her husband, King Henry VIII. But Tyndale's later book "The Practice of Prelates" angered the King because of Tyndale's stand against divorce. Now the King of England along with Papal Rome and the Holy Roman Empire had become Tyndale's

avowed enemy.

BETRAYAL AND DEATH

By 1535 Tyndale thought it safe enough to come out of hiding and enter public ministry. He engaged in a teaching and evangelistic work for a short time until he was betrayed by a fellow Englishman, Henry Phillips. Posing as a friend, Phillips secretly arranged for Tyndale's arrest in Antwerp, Belgium. Tyndale suffered the torture of seclusion in a dungeon prison in the castle of Vilvoorde for over sixteen months before his execution. He was tried and convicted for religious heresy, as an enemy of the English monarch, King Henry VIII and the Church of England.

Tyndale was tied to the stake but was first strangled, and then his body burned on October 6, 1536. The last words that he spoke before his death was a prophetic prayer; "Lord open thou the King of England's eyes " In 1539, within three years after the death of Tyndale, a copy of the English Bible was required to be in every parish church in England. Through the influence of two prominent Protestants, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and Thomas Cromwell, a vicar general, King Henry VIII consented to allow the publication of Miles Coverdale's Great Bible.

By divine providence, Queen Elizabeth I ascended the English throne in 1558. During her reign of 45 years under her strong Protestant influence was the Golden Age of England. The English language flourished because of the influence of Tyndale's Bible which had been translated directly from Hebrew and Greek. Latin and French thus lost dominance as a major factor in the development of the English language. English became a language of poetry and prose as expressed in the works of William Shakespeare. The translation of the King James Bible of 1611 was heavily influenced by Tyndale's earlier translation, thus retaining over 80% of its wording.

God truly answered the prayer of this chosen 'vessel of honor' in his dying hour when he cried; "Lord, open thou the King of England's eyes."