

RESTORE
WILLIAM TYNDALE
Saturday, June 6
Reading: Hebrews 4:12-16

William Tyndale¹ was born on the Welsh border of England in 1494. Several events before his birth would greatly shape his life and work. In 1408, in an attempt to stop the influence of John Wycliffe and his followers, the English Parliament passed the “Constitutions of Oxford” which outlawed translating or reading the Bible in English without permission from the church authorities. People were imprisoned or killed for having any part of the Bible in English. A second event in 1453 was the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire to Moslem invaders that forced many Greek scholars to flee west. This advanced the study of the New Testament in its original Greek instead of the Latin translation that was prominent in England and the west. The other event was the invention of the printing press in 1454 which allowed books to be printed quickly without the errors of copying each book by hand.

Tyndale was a brilliant scholar who could speak 7 languages and was fluent in ancient Hebrew and Greek. After studying at Oxford and Cambridge, he became a tutor for the children of a wealthy family. Often the local priests would visit the home and Tyndale was aghast at their ignorance of the Scriptures. He was determined to translate the Bible into English so everyone could read it in the language they understood but his request was denied by the bishop in London. Undaunted, Tyndale got the support of several English merchants who promised to help him. So in 1524, William Tyndale went to Germany and began his translation. The next year he published his completed New Testament translation and friends smuggled thousands of copies into England. King Henry VIII and the church authorities condemned Tyndale as a heretic and did all they could to suppress his English Bible translation. They bought as many copies as they could find and burned them on huge bonfires. Ironically, Tyndale would use this money from the sales to improve his work and make more copies! He also began to translate the Old Testament. Along with translating, he spent time helping the poor because his heart was “to follow and live according as I teach.”²

In 1534, Tyndale met Henry Phillips and the two men became friends. Phillips would often dine with Tyndale and was one of the few people who was allowed to see Tyndale’s books and papers. But it was all a trap. In May of 1534, Phillips lured Tyndale out of hiding for a lunch meeting and then turned “his friend” over to waiting soldiers. Tyndale was arrested and spent a year-and-a-half in prison before being brought to trial. He was condemned as a heretic and sentenced to death.

On October 6, 1536, William Tyndale was bound to a stake with wood piled all around him. According to reports, his last prayer was, “Lord, open the eyes of the king of England.” He was then strangled and his body was burned and his ashes scattered to the wind. But his work lives on! Three years later, King Henry VIII authorized an English Bible be placed in every parish in England for the parishioners to read. Tyndale’s work was used in many of the future translations including the King James Version (1611) where 84% of the New Testament words come from Tyndale’s translation. Because of his faithfulness and commitment to see the Bible in the language of the people, William Tyndale is often called “the father of the English Bible.”

¹ <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1501-1600/translator-william-tyndale-strangled-and-burned-11629961.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tyndale

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/scholarsandscientists/william-tyndale.html>