

Chapter Eleven

(From *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*
A New English Translation
A Faithful Version with Commentary)

A Tribute to William Tyndale

The “Father” of all English Bibles

The history of the modern English Bible rightly begins with William Tyndale, the first man to translate both the New Testament from the Byzantine Greek and the Old Testament from the Hebrew text into English. So profound was his work that all subsequent English Bibles stand in the shadow of his translations. Noted Tyndale biographer David Daniell wrote: “William Tyndale (1494-1536) was the first person to **translate** the Bible into English from its original Greek and Hebrew and the first to **print** the Bible in English, which he did in exile. Giving the laity access to the Word of God outraged the clerical establishment in England: he was condemned, hunted, and eventually murdered. However, **his masterly translation formed the basis of all English Bibles**—including the ‘*King James Bible*,’ many of whose finest passages were taken unchanged, though unacknowledged, from Tyndale’s work” (Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, dust jacket; bold emphasis added).

According to Daniell, “Tyndale grew up to be a remarkable linguist, noted in Europe for knowing seven languages as well as English, like a native.” Apparently, Tyndale attended Oxford University in 1506 at age twelve. Afterwards he attended Cambridge University from 1517-1520, where he and other fellow students were converted to Christ after studying Erasmus’ 1516 Greek New Testament (Ibid., pp. 14, 27, 49).

From the evidence of his life and work, there is no doubt that God had specially prepared, called and converted William Tyndale for the task of translating the Holy Scriptures into English. It is apparent that Tyndale was led by the Holy Spirit and driven by a holy passion to translate the Word of God so that common men and women everywhere could have the Scriptures to read and study for themselves.

Tyndale Translates the New Testament

Tyndale was fully convicted that what was needed was a New Testament in English directly from the Greek—to make the Word of God available in English for the ordinary man. So determined was Tyndale that he was willing to defy the pope himself—who vehemently opposed any effort to translate the Scriptures into English. According to Daniell, Tyndale once found himself in a dispute with a “learned” individual who said that it was better to be “without God’s law than the pope’s.” To this Tyndale replied, “**I defy the Pope and all his laws**. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause [even] a boy that driveth the plough [to] know more of the scripture than thou dost” (Ibid., pp. 78-79).

Daniell continues: “Tyndale’s problem was finding a high enough authority [in the church] to work under, to exempt him from the fatal charge of heresy under the Constitutions of Oxford [of 1410, which strictly outlawed the Scriptures in English under penalty of death]” (Ibid., p. 79).

But Tyndale was single-minded and undaunted in his purpose of translating and printing the Bible into English. In the summer of 1523, Tyndale went to London to seek permission from the bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, to translate the Scriptures. Tunstall denied Tyndale permission—so Tyndale exiled himself to Europe in April 1524. He first went to Hamburg, Germany, then to Wittenberg where he met Martin Luther, and then on to Cologne in 1525, where he not only translated the Greek New Testament into English but also proceeded to have it printed. This initial printing, however, was interrupted when Tyndale was forced to flee those seeking to have him arrested. Tyndale escaped and went to Worms, where

he first published his translation of the New Testament in 1526 (Ibid., pp. 83, 108-109). According to Daniell, the print run was said to be three or six thousand, of which only two copies have survived (Ibid., p. 134).

Daniell comments: "It was Tyndale's revision of this [Worms] New Testament eight years later in 1534 which not only went forward into later Renaissance Bibles, most notably the *Authorized* [King James] *Version*, but is still dominant, even today....

"What still strikes a late-twentieth-century reader is how modern it is. There are occasional words that have been lost to common use since 1526 ... [but] both vocabulary and syntax are not only recognizable today, they still belong to today's language. This seems to be for two reasons. First, Tyndale goes for clear, everyday, spoken English.... The result is that Tyndale usually feels more modern than the Authorized Version, though that revision was made nearly a century later. The second reason is that Tyndale makes a language for the Word of God, which speaks to the heart..." (Ibid., pp. 134-135).

Over time, England was literally flooded with Tyndale's outlawed Bibles, smuggled into England from Germany. In order to stamp out this heretical Book, Roman Catholic authorities, under orders from Bishop Tunstall, burned thousands of Tyndale's New Testaments and books. But thousands more were smuggled in and sold on the black market, in spite of the fact that those who owned or read them were subject to torture or death by burning or beheading.

In addition to translating the New Testament and Old Testament, Tyndale wrote other books that explained and expounded upon the Scriptures. These are: *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, 1527; *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 1528; Preface to the Five Books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, 1530; Prologues: *To the Prophet Jonas*; *The Gospels*: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; Prologues to the following Epistles: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I and II Peter, the three Epistles of John and Jude.

Tyndale's Old Testament Translation

Not only did Tyndale translate the New Testament from Greek into English, but he translated the Old Testament as well. In his biography of Tyndale, Daniell wrote of Tyndale's Pentateuch: "Some time in January 1530 there began to appear in England, smuggled in from Antwerp, copies of a well-made little book, again printed by Hoochstraten of Antwerp ... the title-page of which simply announced *The first book of Moses called Genesis*, and nothing more. The next page began a prologue with the words 'W. T. To the Reader'; so there could be no doubt about its origins.

"These opening chapters of Genesis are the first translations—not just the first printed, but the first translations—from Hebrew into English. This needs to be emphasized. Not only was the Hebrew language only known in England in 1529 and 1530 by, at the most, a tiny handful of scholars in Oxford and Cambridge, and quite possibly by none; that there was a language called Hebrew at all, or that it had any connection whatsoever with the Bible, would have been news to most of the ordinary population.... Now here in 1530 was Genesis, from the Hebrew, in English, in a form that fitted a pocket" (Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, pp. 283, 287).

Tyndale, according to Daniell, insisted that it was essential that one be able to study the *whole* of the Hebrew Law in order to understand what Christ did with the Law. He notes that "Tyndale discovered that Hebrew goes wonderfully into English—better than into Latin, and better even than Latin goes into English....

"Tyndale ... was engaged in a full-scale work of translating Hebrew into English. His discovery of the happy linguistic marriage of the two languages [was] of high significance for the history of western Christian theology, language and literature.... **All Old Testament English versions descend from Tyndale**; even of the books of the Old Testament which he did not reach. Miles Coverdale, who first gave us printed in English the second half of the Old Testament, had worked with Tyndale, and imitated him" (Ibid., pp. 288-289; bold emphasis added).

Concerning Tyndale's Old Testament, Daniell wrote: "William Tyndale's Old Testament translations laid the foundation of our English Bible.... **Two generations later, in 1611, the scholars and divines who made the Authorized Version under King James were happy to use what Tyndale had given them, though without acknowledgement. Very many great passages from the Pentateuch come to us [directly] from Tyndale**" (Daniell, *Introduction to*

Tyndale's Old Testament, p. ix; bold emphasis added).

A thousand years before Tyndale, the Bible existed in the form of a fourth-century Latin version known as the Vulgate. But, as Daniell writes, it was “very much the property of the Church. In Tyndale’s time, to go behind the Latin to the scriptural Greek and Hebrew, and then furthermore **to seek to make those Bible texts available in portable volumes printed in English, so that anyone at all could have a copy and read it, was blasphemous and treasonable, punishable by torture or death...**” (Ibid., p. ix, bold emphasis added).

Tyndale on Grace, Faith and Law

Today, Protestant theology is an odd mixture of grace and lawlessness. On the one hand, it claims the grace of God for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, which is accepted, praised and loudly preached. On the other hand, it insists that Jesus came to abolish the Law. The conclusion is that once one has been “saved,” he or she no longer needs to keep the laws and commandments of God—except to “love God in one’s heart.” The result is a counterfeit emotional gospel mostly devoid of any need to obey God’s commands or to understand the doctrines of Christ. Thus, the hallmark of Protestantism is a *lawless grace* that is contrary to the teachings of Jesus and His apostles.

Had all of Tyndale’s writings been retained, published and taught, perhaps the course of Protestantism in England would have been much different—because Tyndale did *not* teach a lawless grace. As the Reformation began in England, Tyndale was perhaps the most powerful influence through his translations of the Old and New Testaments as well as his other writings. Tyndale wrote about human nature, Satan, sin, law, grace, mercy, forgiveness and the love of God. He fully believed in keeping the laws and commandments of God “from the bottom ground of the heart.” Furthermore, he taught repentance toward God, justification of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ and salvation by faith, not by works.

Yet, the clergy of England, for political reasons as well as jealousy, rejected his clear teachings on law and grace. As a result, when the Bible was finally allowed to be printed in English, beginning in 1537, only the Scriptures were printed. Tyndale’s other writings that revealed the clear scriptural truth about law and grace were excluded. Thus, an uninspired clergy, through faulty interpretations of the Scriptures, gradually developed a doctrine of lawless grace.

Contrary to Protestant or Catholic theology, Tyndale correctly understood law and grace. He clearly understood the difference between practicing vain works of human religious traditions and superstitions as opposed to keeping the commandments and laws of God from the heart. Moreover, he fully comprehended that justification of past sins comes only by deep personal repentance toward God and faith in the blood of Christ for forgiveness, followed by baptism. He understood that eternal life cannot come through any law—rather it is the gift of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For example, Tyndale wrote in his 1534 *Revised New Testament*: “**All the whole law** which was given to utter [to expose] our corrupt nature, **is comprehended in the ten commandments**. And the ten commandments are comprehended in these two: love God and thy neighbour. And he that loveth his neighbour in God and Christ, fulfilleth these two, and consequently the ten, and finally all the other...” (David Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament, Modern Spelling*, “W. T. Unto the Reader,” pp. 3-4; bold emphasis added).

Tyndale also wrote: “**Now read all the scripture and see where God sent any to preach mercy to any, save unto them only that repent and turn to God with all their hearts, to keep his commandments.... Let us so put our trust in the mercy of God through Christ, that we know it our duty to keep the law of God and to love our neighbours...**” (Ibid., pp. 5, 7; bold emphasis added).

In an era of gross superstition and spiritual ignorance, it is astounding that William Tyndale had such a deep and profound spiritual understanding of the Scriptures. It is evident that he was led by the Holy Spirit into the truth of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

Tyndale Exposed and Rejected the Evils and Corruption of Roman Catholicism

Tyndale wrote extensively against the evils and corruption of Roman Catholicism using the most impassioned words possible. He denounced the foolish ceremonies of the Mass and the evil and fearful superstitions instilled in the people by the clergy in order to keep the people in bondage to Rome. In his day, William Tyndale was one of many who were raising their voices against the Church of Rome and the abuses of the papacy. However, because he was translating and printing the Bible in English, he was their number one enemy. The true freedom in Christ found in the Scriptures struck at the very heart of Rome's religious bondage and political power.

Contrary to the presumptuous and blasphemous edicts of various popes, Tyndale fully understood that anyone who professed to represent God and His Word would believe, teach and follow God's Word as led by the Holy Spirit. He vehemently opposed the pope, the Roman Catholic Church and their teachings as those of Antichrist. Tyndale's writings clearly show that he understood the Roman Catholic Church to be the "Great Whore" and "Antichrist" spoken of in Revelation 17 and 13.

Tyndale's Betrayal, Arrest and Execution

From 1525-35, Tyndale was able to evade the authorities who were seeking to arrest and execute him. But in the spring of 1535, while Tyndale was living in Antwerp, a traitor named Henry Phillips was stalking Tyndale at the behest and hire of the Catholic authorities. After befriending Tyndale, Phillips arranged to betray him and led the authorities to entrap and arrest him. Tyndale was arrested in May 1535, and they imprisoned him at Vilvorde Castle, near Brussels, where he remained until his death in October 1536 (Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, pp. 361-384). While in prison Tyndale continued to translate the Old Testament. His friend and assistant John Rogers, frequently visited Tyndale and compiled the rest of his Old Testament translation.

Of Tyndale's execution, Daniell wrote: "Early in the morning of one of the first days of October 1536, Tyndale was executed.... He was strangled at the stake, and his dead body then burned.... [Just before his death he cried [out] thus at the stake with a fervent zeal, and [with] a loud voice, '**Lord! Open the king of England's eyes**'" (Ibid., pp. 382-383).

With his final plea to God, William Tyndale was martyred—executed for his "high crimes" against the pope and emperor, because he loved God the Father and Jesus Christ with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind and all his strength—for translating the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew into English for the common man and woman.

How God Answered Tyndale's Prayer

In translating the Scriptures into English and writing books, Tyndale was hoping for repentance and reformation in England. And in the end, Tyndale's works—especially his New Testament and *The Obedience of a Christian Man*—indeed ignited the fires of reformation in England and changed the course of history. Many were moved to repent and turn to God. At some point Henry VIII himself read *The Obedience of a Christian Man* and saw the scriptural rationale that enabled him to sever all ties with Rome. In 1534, he renounced the pope, furthering the reformation and establishing the Church of England as the state church.

The separation from Rome was the first step that eventually led Henry VIII to order the *English Bible* to be placed in all churches in England, printed under license from the king in 1537. Thus, less than two years after his death, Tyndale's prayer—"Lord! Open the king of England's eyes!"—began to be answered.

The *English Bible* was actually Tyndale's translation of the Old and New Testaments, renamed the "*Thomas Matthews*" Bible. After Tyndale's death, his associate and friend John Rogers finalized Tyndale's work on the Old Testament, making it ready for print. Authorities note that the so-called *Matthews Bible* was actually the work of Rogers. Rogers, however, made it clear that the translation of the entire Old Testament was, in fact, Tyndale's work (Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, p. 335).

In 1538, also by the king's authority, the "*Great Bible*," published by Miles Coverdale, another one of Tyndale's associates, was printed and placed in all the churches in England.

William Tyndale—one man against the world, empowered by the Spirit of God, filled with the love of God, and thirsting for the Word of God—translated the Scriptures into English with selfless sacrifice and dedicated determination. From his day to the present, the *English Bible*, beginning with his translations, has impacted the civilizations of English-speaking people far more than any other book. Tyndale could never have imagined that nearly five hundred years after his prayer to "open the king of England's eyes," God would cause the English language to become the predominant language to be used to preach and publish the Gospel literally around the world, as Jesus prophesied, "...to the ends of the earth!"