WILLIAM TYNDALE: C. 1494 Â€“ 1536

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Category: Bible Translation in History



William Tyndale was one of the earliest people to translate the Bible into English, and today marks the four hundred and seventy third anniversary of his death.

Tyndale grew up in Gloucestershire, an area that had warmly received John Wycliffe and his followers. It seems that Tyndale was convinced of the need for a translation of the Bible into English from an early age and he became adept at reading Greek and Latin as well as the Bible during his time as a student at Oxford.

Tyndaleâ€™s skill with the Scriptures would lead to accusations of heresy, though these were never proved. An incident recorded by the historian John Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments* (known today as *Foxeâ€™s Book of Martyrs*) strengthened Tyndaleâ€™s commitment to give the English people a Bible they could finally understand. Foxe relates that a learned man told Tyndale, â€œWe were better to be without Godâ€™s law than the popeâ€™s.â€ Tyndale replied, â€œI defy the pope, and all his laws,â€ and added that â€œif God spared life, ere many years he would cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than did.â€

His translation of the Bible into English had a great influence on the translators of the King James Version and as a result, many phrases that first occur in his Bible have entered into common use, even today. 'Let there be light', 'we live and move and have our being', 'fight the good fight', 'the signs of the times', 'the powers that be', 'a law unto themselves', and hundreds more were first recorded in Tyndale's work.

Tyndale lived at a point in history where being a Bible translator was not quite the same as it is today. Tyndale was hounded by the English authorities and fled to the Netherlands, but was eventually betrayed and burned at the stake on October 6 1536. Foxe records his dying words as 'Lord open the king of England's eyes'.

His prayer appears to have been answered within a matter of months. Shortly after Tyndaleâ€™s death, King Henry VIII licensed the first official English Bible. Published in 1537 and named â€œMatthewâ€™s Bible,â€ it was prepared by Tyndaleâ€™s friend, John Rogers, and included Tyndaleâ€™s final revision of his 1534 New Testament, the 1534 Pentateuch and his Old Testament work up to the book of Chronicles.

You can read more about Tyndale on Wikipedia (if you must) and there is a good short biography here (which I have used in this post). The Tyndale Society has a lot of interesting information. However, the last words in this should go to Tyndale himself in his introduction to the Pentateuch:

> *Which thing only moved me to translate the New Testament. Because I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to stablish the lay people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text.*

There are still 'lay people' speaking 2393 languages who are waiting for the scriptures to be 'plainly laid before their eyes'. Tyndale's work remains unfinished and our generation needs to carry it on.