Tyndale Bible

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The **Tyndale Bible** generally refers to the body of biblical translations by William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536). Tyndale's Bible is credited with being the first English translation to work directly from Hebrew and Greek texts. Furthermore, it was the first English biblical translation that was mass-produced as a result of new advances in the art of printing. The term *Tyndale's Bible* is not strictly correct, because Tyndale never published a complete Bible. Prior to his execution Tyndale had only finished translating the entire New Testament and roughly half of the Old Testament.[1] Of the latter, the Pentateuch, Jonah and a revised version of the book of Genesis were published during his lifetime. His other Old Testament works were first used in the creation of the Matthew Bible and also heavily influenced every major English translation of the Bible that followed.[2]

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History   [edit]

The chain of events that led to the creation of Tyndale's New Testament possibly began in 1522, the year Tyndale acquired a copy of Martin Luther's German New Testament. Inspired by Luther's work, Tyndale began a translation into English using a Greek text "compiled by Erasmus from several manuscripts older and more authoritative than the Latin Vulgate" of St. Jerome (A.D. c.340-420), the only translation authorized by the Roman Catholic Church.[3][4]

Tyndale made his purpose known to the Bishop of London at the time, Cuthbert Tunstall, but was refused permission to produce this "heretical" text. Thwarted in England, Tyndale moved to the continent.[5] A partial edition was put into print in 1525 in Cologne. But before the work could be completed, Tyndale was betrayed to the authorities[6] and forced to flee to Worms, where the first complete edition of his New Testament was published in 1526.[7]

Two revised versions were later published in 1534 and 1536, both personally revised by Tyndale himself. After his death in 1536 Tyndale's works were revised and reprinted numerous times[8] and are reflected in more modern versions of the Bible, including, perhaps most famously, the King James Bible.

Tyndale's Pentateuch was published at Antwerp by Merten de Keyser in 1530.[9] His English version of the book of Jonah was published the following year. This was followed by his revised version of the book of Genesis in 1534. Tyndale translated additional Old Testament books including Joshua, Judges, first and second Samuel, first and second Kings and first and second Chronicles, but they were not published and have not survived in their original forms.[10] When Tyndale was martyred these works came to be in the possession of one his associates John Rogers. These translations would be influential in the creation of the Matthew Bible which was published in 1537.[10]

Tyndale used a number of sources when carrying out his translations of both the New and Old Testaments. When translating the New Testament, he referred to the third edition (1522) of Erasmus's Greek New Testament, often referred to as the Received Text. Tyndale also used Erasmus' Latin New Testament, as well as Luther's German version and the Vulgate.

Scholars believe that Tyndale stayed away from using Wycliffe's Bible as a source because he didn't want his English to reflect that which was used prior to the Renaissance.[11] The sources Tyndale used for his translation of the Pentateuch however are not known for sure. Scholars believe that Tyndale used either the Hebrew Pentateuch or the Polyglot Bible, and may have referred to the Septuagint. It is suspected that his other Old Testament works were translated directly from a copy of the Hebrew Bible. He also made abundant use of Greek and Hebrew grammars.[10]

The beginning of the Gospel of John from a copy of the 1526 edition of William Tyndale's New Testament at the British Library.

Reaction of the Catholic Church   [edit]

Tyndale's translations were condemned in England, where his work was banned and copies burned.[12][13] Catholic officials, prominently Thomas More,[14] charged that he had purposely mistranslated the ancient texts in order to promote anti-clericalism and heretical views.[15] In particular they cited the terms "church", "priest", "do penance" and "charity", which became in the Tyndale translation "congregation", "senior" (changed to "elder" in the revised edition of 1534), "repent" and "love", challenging key doctrines of the Roman Church. Betrayed to church officials in 1536, he was defrocked in an elaborate public ceremony and turned over to the civil authorities to be strangled to death and burned at the stake. His last words are said to have been, "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes."[16]

Challenges to Catholic doctrine   [edit]

The Catholic Church had long proclaimed that the church was an institution. The word *church* to them had come to represent the organizational structure that was the Catholic Church.[17] Tyndale's translation was seen as a challenge to this doctrine because he was seen to have favored the views of reformers like Martin Luther who proclaimed that the church was made up and defined by the believers, or in other words their congregations.

The Tyndale Bible on display at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Some radical reformers preached that the true church was the "invisible" church, that the church is wherever true Christians meet together to preach the word of God. To these reformers the structure of the Catholic Church was unnecessary and its very existence proved that it was in fact not the "true" Church.[18] When Tyndale decided that the Greek word ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) was more accurately translated *congregation*, he was undermining the entire structure of the Catholic Church.

Many of the reform movements believed in the authority of scripture alone. To them it dictated how the church should be organized and administered.[19] By changing the translation from *church* to *congregation* Tyndale was providing ammunition for the beliefs of the reformers. Their belief that the church was not a visible systematized institution but a body defined by the believers themselves was now to be found directly in the Holy Scripture.

Furthermore, Tyndale's use of the word *congregation* attacked the Catholic Church's doctrine that the lay members and the clergy were to be separate.[20] If the true church is defined as a congregation, as the common believers, then the Catholic Church's claim that the clergy were of a higher order than the average Christian and that they had different roles to play in the religious process no longer held sway.

Tyndale's translation of the Greek word πρεσβύτερος (presbuteros) to mean elder instead of priest also challenged the doctrines of the Catholic Church.[21] In particular, it asked what the role of the clergy should be and whether or not they were to be separated from the common believers as they were in the current Catholic system.

The role of the priest in the Catholic Church had been to lead religious sermons and ceremonies like mass, to read the scripture to the people, and to administer the sacraments. They were considered separate from the common believers.[20] In many reform movements a group of elders would lead the church and take the place of the Catholic priests. These elders were not a separate class from the common believers; in fact, they were usually selected from amongst them.[22]

Many reformers believed in the idea of the "priesthood of all believers," which meant that every Christian was in fact a priest and had the right to read and interpret scripture.[23] Tyndale's translation stripped away the scriptural basis of Catholic clerical power. Priests no longer administered the church: it was the job of the elders, which implied that the power rested in the hands of the people.

Catholic doctrine was also challenged by Tyndale's translation of the Greek μετανοεῖτε (metanoeite) as *repent* instead of *do penance*.[24] This translation attacked the Catholic sacrament of penance. Tyndale's version of scripture backed up the views of reformers like Luther who had taken issue with the Catholic practice of sacramental penance. Reformers believed that it was through faith alone that one was saved.[25]

This differed from the views of the Catholic Church, which followed the belief that salvation was granted to those who lived according to what the church told them and thus participated in the seven sacraments.[26] Tyndale's translation challenged the belief that one had to do penance for one's sins. According to Tyndale's New Testament and other reformers, all a believer had to do was repent with a sincere heart, and God would forgive.

The Tyndale Bible also challenged the Catholic Church in many other ways. The fact that it was translated into a vernacular language made it available to the common people. This allowed everyone access to scripture and gave the common people the ability to read (if they were literate) and interpret scripture how they wished, exposing it to the threat of being "twisted to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures" (2 Peter 3.16) instead of relying on the church for their access to scripture.

The main threat that Tyndale's Bible caused to the Catholic Church is best summed up by Tyndale himself when he tells us of his reason for creating his translation in the first place. Tyndale's purpose was to "[cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more scripture] than the clergy of the day",[27] many of which were poorly educated. Thus Tyndale sought to undermine the Catholic Church's grip on both the access to and interpretation of scripture. They were no longer needed as intercessors between the people and God.

Legacy   [edit]

Tyndale's Bible laid the foundations for many of the English Bibles which followed his. His work made up a significant portion of the Great Bible which was the first authorized version of the English Bible.[28] The Tyndale Bible also played a key role in spreading reformation ideas to England which had been reluctant to embrace the movement. By including many of Martin Luther's commentaries in his works,[29] Tyndale also allowed the people of England direct access to the words and ideas of Luther, whose works had been banned in England.

Perhaps the Tyndale Bible's greatest impact is that it heavily influenced and contributed to the creation of the King James Version, which is one of the most popular and widely used Bibles in the world today. It

has been suggested that around 90% of the King James Version (or at least of the parts translated by Tyndale) is from Tyndale's works, with as much as one third of the text being word for word Tyndale.[30] Many of the popular phrases and Bible verses that people quote today are mainly in the language of Tyndale. An example of which is Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers."[31]

The importance of the Tyndale Bible in shaping and influencing the English language has been mentioned. According to one writer, Tyndale is "the man who more than Shakespeare even or Bunyan has moulded and enriched our language."[32] Tyndale used *thou* and never *you* as the singular second-person pronoun in his work (usage that was later reflected in the very influential King James Version), which had the double effect of rescuing *thou* from complete obscurity and also imbuing it with an air of religious solemnity that is antithetical to its former sense of familiarity or disrespect.[33]

Tyndale used *ester* for *pesach* in his New Testament, where Wycliffe had used *pask*. When Tyndale embarked on his Old Testament translation, he realised that the anachronism of *ester* could not be sustained; and so coined the neologism, *passover*; which later bible versions adopted, and substituted for *ester* in the New Testament as well. Its remnant is seen as *Easter* in the King James Version in one single place of Acts 12:4 and in the Bishops' Bible in two places, John 11:55 as well as Acts 12:4.

See also   [edit]

- *Matthew Bible*
- *Great Bible*
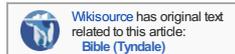- *Geneva Bible*

Notes   [edit]

1. ^ Kenyon 1936, pp. 47–49.
2. ^ Partridge 1973, pp. 38–39, 52.
3. ^ British Library online catalog of sacred books.
4. ^ Partridge 1973, p. 38.
5. ^ Pollard 1974, pp. 87–89.
6. ^ Teems 2012, pp. 51-52.
7. ^ Thompson 1963, p. 6.
8. ^ Partridge 1973, pp. 38–39.
9. ^ Arblaster, Juhász & Latré 2002, p. 132.
10. ^ *a* *b* *c* Arblaster, Juhász & Latré 2002, p. 53.
11. ^ Arblaster, Juhász & Latré 2002, p. 38.
12. ^ Pollard 1974, pp. 87–91.
13. ^ Thompson 1963, p. 7.
14. ^ Partridge 1973, p. 40.
15. ^ Partridge 1973, pp. 40–41.
16. ^ Foxe 1570, VIII. 1229.
17. ^ Partridge 1973, pp. 41–42.
18. ^ Lindberg 1996, pp. 202–204.
19. ^ Lindberg 1996, pp. 70-72.
20. ^ *a* *b* Lindberg 1996, p. 99.
21. ^ Partridge 1973, pp. 92.
22. ^ Lindberg 1996, pp. 262-263.
23. ^ Lindberg 1996, p. 163.
24. ^ Partridge 1973, p. 42.
25. ^ Luther 1957, pp. 343–353.
26. ^ "Tridentine Creed". TraditionalCatholic.net.
27. ^ Coggan 1968, p. 18.
28. ^ Kenyon 1936, pp. 48-50.
29. ^ Lindberg 1996, pp. 314-315.
30. ^ Coggan 1968, pp. 18-19.
31. ^ Partridge 1973, pp. 52.

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External links   [edit]

- "Studylight version of Tyndale New Testament, actually from the 1534 edition". Studylight. Searchable by phrase or chapter/verse reference.
- "Online version of Sir Frederic G. Kenyon's article". *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*. 1909.
- "Tyndale New Testament article, with zoomable image". British Library.

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Bible (Tyndale)

v · t · e	English language translations of the Bible
5th–11th century	Wessex Gospels · Hatton gospels · Old English Hexateuch · Old English Bible translations
Middle English	Wycliffe · Middle English Bible translations
16th–17th century	Tyndale · Coverdale · Matthew · Great Bible · Taverner · Geneva · Bishops' · Douay–Rheims · King James
18th–19th century	Challoner · Webster's · Young's Literal · Revised · Living Oracles · Darby · Emphatic Diaglott · Joseph Smith · Quaker
20th century	American Standard · Rotherham's Emphasized · Ferrar Fenton · Worrell New Testament · Knox · Basic English · Revised Standard · Anchor · New World · Modern Language Bible · New English Bible · The Bible in Living English · New American Standard · Good News · Jerusalem · New American · Living · New International · New Century · Bethel · New King James · New Jerusalem · Green's Literal Translation · Recovery · Christian Community · New Revised Standard · Revised English · Contemporary English · The Message · Clear Word · New Life · 21st Century King James · Third Millennium · New International Reader's · New International Inclusive Language · God's Word · New Living · Heinz Cassirer's translation · Complete Jewish Bible · International Standard · Holman Christian Standard
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