

## How We Got the Bible

### Lesson 11 - History of the English Bible Teacher's Notes

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Aim: To give a brief outline of the way we received our English Bible.
2. We are separated from the Bible in two ways: Time and Language
  - a. To bridge the separation of language we have translations.
  - b. Latin was one of the earliest translations
  - c. But since we speak English we are interested in those translations
3. The early Bibles in England were in Latin.
4. The story of how the Bible was translated into English is interesting and tragic.
5. For nearly 1,000 years, the language of the Bible was Latin, not Hebrew and Greek. Who were those rebels, wanting to translate the Bible into a vulgar language?
6. Our personal Bibles in English came at a bloody price.

#### Discussion

#### I. THE EARLY ENGLISH VERSIONS

- A. Caedmon (mid 7th cent.)
  1. Arranged various Bible stories in verse form
  2. Subjects ranged from creation to the work of the apostles
  3. Not a translation, but an English account
  4. Much like our Bible Story books.
- B. Aldhelm (d. 709)-translated a portion of Psalms in English
- C. The venerable Bede (d. 735)-said to have translated John in English before his death

D. King Alfred (d. 901)

1. Led a religious reform
2. Resulted in Psalms and other selections translated in English

E. Abbot Aelfric (10th cent.)

1. Additional portions of the Old Testament
2. Surviving works: the Pentateuch, some of the OT historical books, Psalms, the Gospels

F. After the Norman Conquest (1066), the language evolved to Middle English

G. William of Shoreham (13th cent.) & Richard Rolle (14th cent.)

H. The struggle to translate the Bible into the language of the common people would last for two hundred years

**II. John Wycliffe** (1330-1384)

A. Wycliffe, an Oxford scholar –(also spelled “Wycliff” & “Wyclif”),

1. England was full of unrest and faction because the Roman pope demanded money excessively
2. He defended the Parliament's refusal to the pope (1366)
3. He added to the fight social and religious reforms
4. Called for a great spiritual revival

B. Believed in the worth of the common man: "No man was so rude a scholar but that he might learn the words of the Gospel according to his simplicity"

- C. Completed the first translation of the Bible into English (1382), however, translated from the Latin Vulgate
  - 1. A revision was published, thought to be from John Purvey, from a group of followers of Wycliffe known as the Lollards (1388)
  - 2. Wycliffe's bones disinterred and burned, and ashes thrown into the Swift River (1428) 44 years later
    - a. The culmination of continued religious condemnation during Wycliffe's lifetime
    - b. Ordered by the Council of Constance (1415)
  - 3. Thus, preparations begun for the Protestant Reformation (16th cent.)

### III. The Printing Press

- A. The world's first printing press, with moveable metal type, is invented in AD 1455, in Mainz, Germany, by Johann Gutenberg.
- B. This invention is perhaps the single most important event to influence the spread of the Bible
- C. The Gutenberg Bible is the first book ever printed with the printing press. This Latin Vulgate version is often illuminated by artists who hand paint letters and ornaments on each page.

### IV. William Tyndale (1526-1534)

- A. The father of the English Bible
- B. Came from Oxford and continued his studies at Cambridge
  - 1. Erasmus came earlier to Cambridge as a professor of Greek (1511)
    - a. Erasmus, a priest and Greek scholar, publishes a new Greek edition and a more accurate Latin translation of the New Testament in AD 1516.

- b. Erasmus's goal was that everyone be able to read the Bible, "from the farmer in the field to the weaver at the loom."
    - c. His Greek text forms the basis of the Textus Receptus or received text. The Textus Receptus is used later by Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and the King James translators.
  2. Tyndale's Purpose in life: to translate the Bible into English based on the original Greek and Hebrew instead of Latin
  3. Reflected Erasmus's thought
    - a. Of Tyndale in an argument with a scholar who said that one is better off following the Pope's laws more than God's law: "I defy the Pope and all his laws," and "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."
    - b. Erasmus: "I totally disagree with those who are unwilling that the Holy Scriptures, translated into the common tongue, should be read by the unlearned. Christ desires His mysteries to be published abroad as widely as possible. I could wish that even all women should read the Gospel and St Paul's Epistles, and I would that they were translated into all the languages of all Christian people, that they might be read and known not merely by the Scots and the Irish but even by the Turks and the Saracens. I wish that the farm worker might sing parts of them at the plough, that the weaver might hum them at the shuttle, and that the traveller might beguile the weariness of the way by reciting them."
  4. Erasmus issued a Greek New Testament in 1516, Tyndale translated it
    - a. Fled to Cologne, Germany to complete it (1524)
    - b. Tyndale's work associated with Martin Luther, thus Luther's enemies became Tyndale's, too

c. First copies of Tyndale's NT smuggled into England (1526)

C. Translating the OT

1. The Pentateuch (1530)
2. Jonah (1531)
3. A revised Genesis (1534)

D. Two new editions of the NT (1534-1535)

E. Betrayed in 1535 and imprisoned near Brussels

1. Executed by being hanged and burned at the stake
2. While he was being burned at the stake, he cried, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes" (1536)

F. Impact of Tyndale's translation

1. Gave a common language versus scholarly language translation
  - a. "Congregation" instead of "church"
  - b. "Love" instead of "charity"
  - c. "Repentance" instead of "penance"
2. Coined words such as
  - a. "Passover"
  - b. "Scapegoat"
  - c. "Mercy seat"
  - d. "Long-suffering"
3. Gave unforgettable expressions
  - a. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2)
  - b. "The pinnacle of the temple" (Matt. 4:5)
  - c. "The salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13)

- d. "Daily bread" (Matt. 6:11)
  - e. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matt. 6:28)
  - f. "Meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29)
  - g. "Shepherds abiding in the field" (Luke 2:8)
  - h. "Eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19)
  - i. "Fatted calf (Luke 15:23)
  - j. "Only begotten son" (John 1:14,18)
  - k. "In my Fathers house are many mansions" (John 14:2)
  - l. "In whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28)
  - m. "God forbid" (Rom. 3:4)
  - n. "Sounding brass" and "tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1)
  - o. "In the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52)
  - p. "Singing and making melody" (Eph. 5:19)
  - q. "Office of a bishop" (1 Tim. 3:1)
  - r. "The pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25)
  - s. "An advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1)
  - t. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20)
- G. William Tyndale was the first person to take advantage of Gutenberg's movable-type press for the purpose of printing the scriptures in the English language.
- H. William Tyndale's Biblical translations appeared in the following order:
1. New Testament, 1525-26;
  2. Pentateuch, 1530;
  3. Jonah, 1531.

**V. Other Sixteenth-Century Translations** - the flood gates were open

- A. Miles Coverdale (1535)
  - 1. Friend and associate of Tyndale
  - 2. First English translation circulating freely
  
- B. Matthew's Bible (1537)
  - 1. Completed by John Rogers
  - 2. A combination of Tyndale and Coverdale
  - 3. Martyred in 1555
  
- C. Taverner's Bible (1539)
  - 1. Independent revision of Matthew's Bible
  - 2. Improved readings in the NT
  - 3. First Bible printed in England
  
- D. The Great Bible (1540)
  - 1. Edited by Coverdale
  - 2. First English Bible authorized to be read in the churches
  - 3. King Henry VIII had a copy placed in every church in the land
    - a. The preachers complained that the people preferred hearing the Bible read instead of their preaching!
    - b. Tyndale's prayer was answered
  
- E. The Geneva Bible (1560)
  - 1. Many English citizens fled England under the Queen Mary's persecution of non-Catholics
  - 2. Printed in Geneva because it was a city of safe haven

3. Accompanying commentary and illustrations made this Bible the Bible for the families, just as the Great Bible was for the churches
4. Sometimes called "The Breeches Bible" because Adam and Eve "sewed figge tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches" (Gen. 3:7)
5. Popular throughout its approximately 140 editions, even after the appearance of the KJV
  - a. The Bible of Shakespeare in his plays
  - b. The Bible of the Jamestown settlement
  - c. The Bible brought to Plymouth on the Mayflower
6. Evaluation
  - a. Improved Hebrew and Greek scholarship
  - b. The intermediate step between Tyndale and the KJV

#### F. The Bishop's Bible (1568)

1. The Geneva Bible was unpopular with English church officials, because its commentary contained the views of John Calvin and the Reformation
2. Shortcoming-not as scholarly as the Geneva Bible

#### G. The Rheims-Douai Bible

1. First Catholic Bible in English
  - a. NT translated at Rheims College (1582)
  - b. OT translated at Douai College (1609-1610)
2. Translated from the Latin Vulgate

## **VI. The King James Version**

- A. The KJV became the Bible popular for both public and private use
- B. Work ordered by King James I
  - 1. Rules for translating
    - a. The one-sided commentary of the Geneva Bible would be avoided
    - b. Marginal notes would be limited to helps translating the text
  - 2. Translating began in 1607 by forty-eight Greek and Hebrew scholars
    - a. Six workgroups: 2 each at Cambridge, Oxford and Westminster
    - b. Each group was assigned texts to translate; the groups would review each others work
  - 3. Completed in 1611
    - a. Dedicated to King James I
    - b. "Appointed to be read in Churches"
    - c. Original editions contained a preface in which the translators tried to justify the King James translation to the critics
    - d. Went through many subsequent editions/revisions
    - e. Current edition (1769 ed.)
- C. Gradually became accepted universally
  - 1. Immediately replaced the Bishop's Bible in the churches
  - 2. Met stiff competition with the Geneva Bible
- D. Advantages of the KJV
  - 1. Utilized the best scholarship in Hebrew and Greek for its day
  - 2. Literary scholarship was great, e.g., Elizabethan prose and Shakespeare
  - 3. A good English translation was needed for the time
  - 4. The translation was a collaborative effort instead of a one-sided translation

## E. Notes

1. Jack P. Lewis: "For more than two centuries it [the KJV] accomplished what a Bible translation should. It spoke directly to the heart of the common man; that he forgot it was a translation and came to think that it was the original Bible does not negate its worth" (The English Bible: KJV to NIV, p. 33)
2. 80% of Tyndale's translation preserved in the KJV

## **Conclusion** - Review Questions

1. Who was John Wycliffe?
2. Who was William Tyndale?
3. What Bible was called "The Authorized Version" first?
4. What made the KJV superior to its predecessors?

---

---

### **Sources Consulted**

1. How We Got The Bible 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition by Neil R. Lightfoot
  2. Rocky Whitely Oldham Lane church of Christ Abilene, TX
- 
- 

Class notes prepared by Arthur Pigman

Evans Church of Christ

515 Gibbs Road

Evans, Ga. 30809

[www.evansgachurchofchrist.org](http://www.evansgachurchofchrist.org)

e-mail [evanscoc@bellsouth.net](mailto:evanscoc@bellsouth.net)