The English Bible

After a long and dark period of history, spiritual flames started to burn once again in the hearts of the people of Europe. They hungered for the Word of God.

John Wycliffe, an Oxford theologian, was the first to translate hand-written English language manuscripts of the Bible in the 1380's AD. He spent many years arguing against what he saw as the abuses and false teachings of the Roman Church. Wycliffe died a peaceful death, but the Pope was so infuriated by his teachings that 44 years later he ordered the bones to be dug-up, crushed, and scattered in the river. But, the Word would get out!

In the 1450s, Gutenburg invented the printing press, and the first book to ever be printed was the Bible. His Latin copies fueled the flames. Versions in the various languages of Europe were soon to come. With the onset of the Reformation in the early 1500's, the first printings of the Bible into English were produced—illegally and at great personal risk to those involved.

William Tyndale was the captain of the army of reformers and their spiritual leader. He worked mostly alone in translating the English Bible, but he had help from God as the Lord discerned he needed it. Indirectly, he had the help of Erasmus in the publication of his Greek/Latin New Testament printed in 1516. Virtually every European who could read or write would now be able to read the Bible.

Erasmus' Latin was not the Vulgate of Jerome, but his own fresh effort that he had worked from a half-dozen Greek manuscripts that he compiled into a complete Greek New Testament. The Latin that Erasmus translated from the Greek revealed enormous corruptions that had crept into the standard Vulgate Bibles. The Pope was furious and a battle was heating between the established Church of Rome and those wishing to reform it.

With Erasmus' work the stage was set. On Halloween in 1517, Martin Luther declared his intolerance with the Roman Church's corruption by nailing his "95 Theses of Contention" to the Wittenberg Door. Luther set to work in translating the Erasmus Bible into German. Simultaneously, William Tyndale began to translate that same Erasmus text into English, but he would have to leave England to do so.

Tyndale showed up on Luther's doorstep in 1525, and by year's end had translated the New Testament into English. Tyndale was fluent in eight languages and is considered by many to be the primary architect of today's English language. God foiled the plans of the bounty hunters who were after Tyndale, and in 1525-6 William Tyndale printed the first English New Testament.

They were burned as soon as the Bishop could confiscate them, but many copies survived. One even ended up in the bedroom of King Henry VIII. The more the King and Bishop resisted the spread of God's Word, the more fascinated the public became. Good, common people risked death by burning at the stake for being found in possession of God's Holy Bible.

Having God's Word available to the public in the common language would have meant disaster to the Church. No longer could they control the people's ideas and access to the Gospel. The power and influence of the Roman Church would suffer. Salvation by faith would set the people free.

One last point—a very important point! When God moves and sincere people are set aflame to know Him through faith in Jesus, then all the efforts of men to keep and maintain their control over people will fail. This is true religiously, politically, financially, and morally—whether it be here or in Haiti or wherever.

Let us spread the Word of God here and abroad, so that Jesus' mission to be *"the way, the truth, and the life"* will continue to draw people unto the Savior for new life and freedom.

After 11 years on the run, William Tyndale was caught. He had been betrayed by a fellow-Englishman. Tyndale was jailed for 500 days before he was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. His last words were, "Lord, open the eyes of the King of England."

Indeed, let us say, "Father, open the eyes of the people to see your truth and know your Son!"

Scott