

How We Got Our Bible #6

English Bibles Before the KJV

Introduction:

1. God decided to reveal His Word
2. He inspired the Bible writers
3. God watched over and guided the copying process
4. God made sure that the inspired books made it into the Bible and the uninspired books were excluded
5. Tonight we examine early English Bibles before the KJV

I. The Wycliffe Bible

A. Wycliffe's Times

1. Rome Ruled England with an Iron Fist
 - a) *In the 1200s Pope Innocent III had humbled King John of England*
 - (1) King John had displeased the pope so the pope excommunicated him
 - (2) The pope issued a decree declaring that King John was no longer king of England and the people of England were released from obeying him.
 - (3) The pope ordered King Philip of France to organize an army and navy to overthrow John
 - (4) The pope also called for a crusade against John promising the participants remission of their sins and a share of the spoils of war
 - b) *Needless to say, John submitted to the power of the pope and pledged complete allegiance to the pope in all things*
 - (1) John signed an oath in May 15, 1213 (here is part of it)
 - (2) "I John, by the grace of God, King of England and Lord of Ireland, in order to expiate my sins, from my own free will and the advice of my barons, give to the Church of Rome, to Pope Innocent and his successors, the kingdom of England and all other prerogatives of my crown. I will hereafter hold them as the pope's vassal. I will be faithful to God, to the Church of Rome, to the pope my master, and to his successors legitimately elected."
2. Scriptures in the Language of the People Forbidden
 - a) *Scriptures were forbidden in the common language of the people*
 - b) *Wycliffe's enemies claimed that translating Scripture into English would lay "it open to the laity and women who could read"*
 - c) *He was accused of casting the gospel pearl under the feet of swine*

B. Wycliffe's Doctrine

1. Wycliffe's Early Life
 - a) *John Wycliffe was born in 1320 in Yorkshire, England and died in 1384 at Lutterworth, Leicestershire*
 - b) *Details of his early life are obscure*
 - c) *Attended Oxford University and earned a Th.D in 1366*
 - d) *He was a popular and great professor and pastor much of his life*

2. Wycliffe's Break with the Catholic Church

a) *Wycliffe was a Catholic priest but he began to preach against Rome's errors in his mid-30s.*

- (1) He did not reject Rome all at once but gradually as he grew in understanding
- (2) Rejected the Catholic doctrine that tradition = in authority with the Scriptures
- (3) He rejected transubstantiation and indulgences
- (4) He believed in pastors and deacons and all orders above that had been introduced by "Caesarean pride"
- (5) Catholic authorities claimed that Wycliffe rejected infant baptism and they charged him with Anabaptist views.

b) *The pope wanted England under his power and Wycliffe was on the side of the people trying to get out from under that power*

- (1) The luxurious court, sumptuous palaces and high living of the pope caused tremendous expenses and more money was demanded from the countries
- (2) Instead of writing in Latin, Wycliffe began to write tracts in the language of the people against the doctrines of the RCC.

c) *Wycliffe saw the best way to break the power of Romanism was to get the Bible into the hands of the people in their own language*

d) *He said, "Englishmen learn Christ's law best in English."*

3. Wycliffe and the Bible

a) *His foundational doctrine was that the Bible was the sole authority for faith and practice*

b) *Wycliffe believed that each individual had the right to interpret Scripture for himself before the Lord*

c) *"Believers should ascertain for themselves what are the true matters of their faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which all may understand."*

4. Wycliffe and the Papacy

a) *"It is supposed, and with much probability, that the Roman pontiff is the great Antichrist."*

b) *"How shall any sinful wretch, who knows not whether he be damned or saved, constrain men to believe that he is head of the holy Church?" (Sheldon, II, p. 415)*

c) *Wycliffe was hounded by Catholic authorities*

- (1) He was forced to appear before Catholic bishops in the first half of the year 1377 to give account of his doctrine
- (2) The bishops appealed to Pope Gregory XI who issued five papal bulls against Wycliffe in May 1377.
- (3) From then on Wycliffe had trouble with Catholic authorities

d) *Wycliffe's efforts were so despised by the RCC that they issued five papal bulls ordering his arrest, declared him to be a heretic, burned some of his copies of the Bible*

e) *The synod charged Wycliffe with 10 heresies and 16 errors*

- (1) His writings were forbidden
- (2) The king gave authority to imprison all who believed the condemned doctrines

C. Wycliffe's Bible

1. Wycliffe Protected by God

- a) *Wycliffe would have been cut off by the Catholic church had divine intervention not protected him*
- b) *Certain powerful individuals and unusual events were used by God to protect Wycliffe*
 - (1) John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster protected Wycliffe for many years. He was a large man and a bold warrior. His armor is on display in the Tower of London and it is 6ft 9 in tall
 - (2) Joan, the Princess of Wales (1325-1385) was the wife of Edward the Black Prince (so-called because of his black armor). When Wycliffe stood before a tribunal of bishops he was accused of spreading heresies. When the bishops were about to pass sentence, Sir Richard Clifford entered with a message from Joan forbidding them to pass sentence upon Wycliffe. – Fountain, John Wycliffe, p. 33
- c) *In 1378 Pope Gregory XI died, and the Great Papal Schism began, during which there were two (Gregory XII and Benedict III) and then three popes. These popes were too busy hurling curses at one another to worry about Wycliffe in England.*

2. Translation

- a) *Wycliffe's was the 1st complete translation of the Bible in English*
 - (1) The NT was finished in 1380
 - b) The OT was completed in 1382
- b) *It was produced by hand since there was no printing*
- c) *Wycliffe used the Latin Vulgate as his basis for translation and his English version contained the errors common to that version*
- d) *A copy of the Wycliffe Bible often sold for \$150 and it was common for a farmer to give a whole wagonload of hay just to use a NT for a day.*
- e) *While conducting a church service on Dec 28, 1384, Wycliffe was suddenly struck with paralysis and died a few days later.*
- f) *Wycliffe died on Dec 31, 1384*
- g) *43 yrs after his death, they dug up his remains and burned them and threw them into a river.*
 - (1) "The moldering skeleton of the sleeping translator polluted the consecrated ground where it slept."
 - (2) The ashes were thrown into the little river Swift which flows by the Lutterworth church.
 - (3) Thomas Fuller said that the ashes were thrown into the brook Swift which flows into the Avon which flows into the Severn which flows into the sea. This is like the doctrine of Wycliffe which began small and grew to cover the land.

3. The Language

- a) *At the time of this version there was not a standard English what was understood throughout England*
- b) *There was northern, southern and middle English*
- c) *Middle English was the language of Wycliffe's Bible*
- d) *He helped make Middle English the standard throughout England*

4. The Forbidden Book
 - a) *The Bible was worth more than life itself to these believers*
 - b) *The forbidden book was often read by night and those who had not been themselves educated listened with eagerness to the reading of others; but to read it and to hear it read were both forbidden.*
 - c) *People formed groups to pool their money in order to buy the NT*
 - d) *In 1429 Margery Backster was indicted because she asked her maid to “come and hear her husband read the law of Christ out of a book that he was won’t to read at night.”*
 - e) *People were put under oath and had to turn in member of their own family for reading God’s Word*
 - f) *Universal suspicion was created since no one could tell who his accuser might be*
 - g) *Because of the persecution, multitudes of believers were forced to flee to Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and Bohemia.*
 - h) *This caused the forbidden book to spread even in the face of persecution*
 - i) *John Wycliffe is called the “Morningstar of the Reformation”*

II. Tyndale’s Bible

A. The Dates – NT 1525 - Pentateuch + Jonah 1534

B. Background

1. It was an era of spiritual decline
 - a) *New leaders in England stopped the work that Wycliffe had done and things returned to the way they were before Wycliffe*
 - b) *“The clergy had returned to the arrogance and evil ways, and the scandals and wickedness burst forth with renewed energy.*
2. The moral and intellectual condition of the clergy was poor
 - a) *Their power over the masses was complete*
 - b) *Decency was thrown aside and morality was unknown*
 - c) *Brothels were kept in London for special use of the priesthood*
3. Ignorance, vice and immorality of the worst kind, reigned universally
4. It was a time of great change
 - a) *When Tyndale was 8 yrs old Columbus discovered America*
 - b) *When he was 14 yrs old, Vasco de Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope to India and the era of world exploration began*
 - c) *The Spanish Inquisition had begun and by the time Tyndale was 15 yrs old 8,800 had been burned for their faith and 90,000 were imprisoned under the pope’s inquisitor general in Spain*

5. The pope's of Tyndale's day were very powerful and very wicked
 - a) *Sixtus IV established houses of prostitution in Rome*
 - b) *Innocent VIII had seven illegitimate children whom he enriched with church treasures*
 - c) *Alexander VI lived with a Spanish lady and her daughter and reveled in the grossest forms of debauchery*

C. From Wycliffe to Tyndale

1. There were 100 yrs between the death of Wycliffe and the birth of Tyndale (1384 and 1484)
2. There were 145 years between the NT of Wycliffe (1380) and the NT of Tyndale (1525) Much happened in that time span
3. The invention of printing
 - a) *Johann Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany invented the printing press in 1450 and moveable type in 1454*
 - b) *This was a great breakthrough since it took a scribe 10 months to make one copy of the Wycliffe Bible*
 - c) *With the invention of printing, thousands of Bibles could be printed and distributed to the people*
 - d) *By 1469 Italy had a printing press – by 1470 Paris had one and in 1476 England had one*
4. The first printed Greek NT was published by Erasmus in 1516
5. Cheap paper was introduced into Europe
6. The first printed Greek / Hebrew grammars and lexicons appeared

D. The Translator

1. William Tyndale was probably born in Gloucestershire in 1484
2. Attending Oxford University - recvd his BA 1504 and his MA 1511
3. He was a brilliant scholar who spoke seven languages
4. In an argument one day someone said, "We are better off with the pope's laws rather than with God's law."
 - a) *Tyndale said, "I defy the pope and all his laws, if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou."*
 - b) *Tyndale produced his translation of the NT in English but no one in England would print it.*
 - c) *It was too dangerous and it would be illegal*
5. Historian John Christian said, "It is certain he shared many views held by the Baptists, but that he was a member of a Baptist church is nowhere proved."
 - a) *He always translated "ekklesia" by the word "congregation"*
 - b) *He believed in only two church offices, pastors and deacons*
 - c) *He was confident that baptism did not wash away sin*

E. On the Continent

1. To get his Bible printed, Tyndale left England for Hamburg, Germany with the help of wealthy merchants
 - a) *Germany was the "hotbed" for reformation*
 - b) *He hoped that someone there would print it*
2. A printer was finally found and every precaution was taken to ensure secrecy.
 - a) *Work progressed nicely with 3000 copies due to be printed*
 - b) *At a tavern, printers were talking of the project and someone overheard them*
 - c) *The spy bought a few drinks for the printers and learned all about the project*
 - d) *He turned Tyndale and the printers in*
3. Tyndale had to grab his papers and leave quickly
4. He fled to another area of Germany where the printing was completed

F. Reception in England

1. The NT finally were printed and began to pour into England
2. They were smuggled in cases of merchandise, barrels, bales of cloth, sacks of flour and corn etc.
3. Officials tried to stop the influx of NT, but the flow could not be stopped
 - a) *Copies that were intercepted were burned along with other "heretical literature"*
 - b) *Those caught smuggling the forbidden book were imprisoned where they died*
 - c) *Tyndale put out revisions and eventually the Pentateuch was issued*
 - d) *Tyndale dare not return to England*
 - e) *Agents were after him in Germany so he had to flee to Holland*
4. Eventually Tyndale was caught in Holland and sentenced to death
5. The common people gobbled up the Word of God but church officials in England did not accept his translation since it was unauthorized.
6. Tyndale lived with British merchants in Antwerp until he was betrayed in 1535
7. "Since only Anabaptists were burned alive, he escaped that fate." He was given a few minutes to pray, then led to the stake. His feet were fastened to the stake and a chain was put around his neck. Straw and wood were heaped around Tyndale. When the signal was given, the chain was tightened and Tyndale was strangled to death and then the torch was applied and he was quickly burned up.

III. The Coverdale Bible

A. The Dates

1. In 1535 the Coverdale Bible was published
2. It was revised in 1537
3. The Coverdale Bible was the first complete English Bible to be printed

B. The Translator

1. Miles Coverdale was born in 1488 in Yorkshire, England
2. He had been a Catholic but converted to Protestantism and had a great love for the Holy Scriptures
3. He spend some time in Germany and Paris and then returned to England
4. He was a close friend and associate of Tyndale

C. The Translation

1. Between 1525 and 1536 no less than 50,000 Tyndale NT flooded England
2. The King promised that when things calmed down, he would nominate some honest men and see to it that a Bible was “faithfully and honestly translated.”
3. Later the king was reminded of this promise and he chose Coverdale to translate the new version. It was published with “the King’s most gracious license.”
4. Coverdale used Tyndales NT and Gen- Chronicles and translated the rest himself
5. Coverdale was not familiar with Greek and Hebrew so he used what he could for his translation
 - a) *The Latin Vulgate*
 - b) *Luther’s German Bible*
 - c) *Zwingli’s Bible*
6. He was not a translator / but he was a careful editor and compiler
7. Within one year of Tyndale’s death complete English Bibles were available to the English people

IV. The Great Bible

A. The Purpose

1. Two Bibles were authorized by the king – Coverdale’s and Matthew’s
2. They were inaccurate in places and not translated from the original languages
3. They had some notes that were controversial

B. The Translation

1. Using Greek and Hebrew texts, the Matthew's and Coverdale Bibles were revised
2. The printing was done in Paris since England was not yet equipped for a "beautiful and extensive work as was desired"
3. It was called the "Great Bible" because of its large size
4. This was the first Bible to be "authorized" by the king
5. A royal proclamation was issued that commanded that the "Great Bible" be read publicly in every church in the land and that every church have a copy so that all may read it."

V. The Geneva Bible - 1560

1. With RCC "Bloody Mary" on the throne some protestants fled to Geneva where they produced a new translation – the Geneva Bible
2. William Whittingham, a colleague of John Calvin, was the one behind this translation
3. The Geneva Bible was an improvement over previous English versions since the translators were scholars who were able to make revisions from the original languages
4. This was the first Bible to use chapters and verses
5. It was a small and inexpensive Bible that had many notes which were Calvinistic
6. It was very popular among the people but it was not accepted by the Church of England because of the Calvinistic leaning
7. The Geneva Bible was the Bible of Shakespeare and the Pilgrims who came to America

VI. The Bishop's Bible

1. When Elizabeth come to England's throne in 1558, she required every church to have an English Bible.
2. Since the Geneva Bible was not accepted by the Church of England because of its notes, the Bishop's Bible was produced
3. The translators were bishops and the Bishop's Bible was basically a revision of the Great Bible
4. It's quality was not as good as the popular Geneva Bible
5. It was the official Bible in England until 1611 when the KJV was produced