

Saturday, April 25, 2026—2026 GSB STS Meeting—The Life & Times of William Tyndale

Introduction

- 2026 marks the 500th anniversary of William Tyndale's New Testament (NT). The publication of Tyndale's NT was an immensely important event in both the history of the English language and the English Bible.
- I feel fortunate to have lived through the following events:
 - 2011—400th anniversary of the KJB.
 - 2016—500th anniversary of the Erasmus Greek Text.
 - 2017—500th anniversary of the Protestant Revolution.
 - 2026—500th anniversary of Tyndale's New Testament.
- Later this year (2026), October 16-18, at Grace Life Bible Church in Grand Rapids, MI we are devoting our 2026 Bible Conference to studying the life and impact of William Tyndale. In anticipation of that meeting Richard asked me if I would teach two sessions on Tyndale this weekend. I will say more about the conference at the end of my 2nd talk.
- I have chosen to organize my talks as follows:
 - *The Life & Times Of William Tyndale*—will focus on the pre-Tyndale historical context and major events of Tyndale's life and martyrdom.
 - *Rough Draft: Assessing Tyndale's Impact on the KJB*—will focus specially on Tyndale's translation work with a focus on how his worked served as a rough draft of the KJB.
- My first talk will be organized as follows:
 - Pre-Tyndale Historical Context
 - The Life & Times Of William Tyndale

Pre-Tyndale Historical Context

- To understand the historical context in which Tyndale lived and worked a working knowledge of the following issues is imperative:
 - A Brief History of the English Language

- Wycliffe Bible & Catholic Response
- Invention of the Printing Press
- Fall of Constantinople
- Spirit of the Renaissance

A Brief History of the English Language

- Three distinct periods mark the development of English:
 - Old English—6th century (500s) to the Norman Conquest of 1066
 - The Venerable Bede (c. 672/673–735)—Gospel of John
 - Alfred the Great (849–899)—10 Commandments, Parts of Exodus, Psalms, & Acts
 - West Saxon Gospels (990)—the extant Anglo-Saxon Gospels contain all the following verses omitted from the Critical Text and Modern Versions: Matthew 12:21, 18:11; Mark 7:16, 9:44, 46, 15:28; Luke 17:36; John 5:4. They also include the long end of Mark (16:9-20) and the woman taken in adultery passage (John 7:53-811). Only Matthew 23:14 is missing in its entirety whereas Mark 11:26 is missing the second half of the verse.
 - Middle English—1100 to 1500
 - *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer was written between 1387 and 1400. Written in Middle English, this collection of 24 stories was composed towards the end of Chaucer's life and remained unfinished when he died in 1400.
 - Wycliffe Bible was translated between 1382 & 1395.
 - Modern English—1500 to the present
 - 1526 Tyndale New Testament
- David Crystal begins his 2026 work commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Tyndale New Testament *William Tyndale: and the English Language* with the following lines about where Tyndale fits on the above timeline.
 - “William Tyndale was born in 1484 and died in 1536. But when was he, linguistically? The period known as Middle English is usually dated to the end with the arrival of

printing in 1476, when William Caxton set up his press in London. Early Modern English follows, a period that spans the following two centuries. Putting this in everyday terms, Tyndale's grandparents could have spoken to Chaucer, and a grandchild of anyone living in the 1520s could have spoken to Shakespeare. So anyone born in the 1590s would hear a kind of speech which was already at a considerable remove from that found in *The Canterbury Tales*, though still retaining echoes of medieval times." (Crystal, 6)

Wycliffe Bible & Catholic Response

- In the 1380s, John Wycliffe translated the Bible out of Latin into the Middle English. These Bibles were all copied by hand seeing that the printing press had not been invented yet. Donald L Brake author of *A Visual History of the English Bible* reports the following regarding the influence of the Wycliffe Bible:
 - "In spite of the bitter opposition, the reading of the English Bible continued. There are today—six hundred years later—about 250 recorded copies of the Wycliffe Bible. The large number in spite of intense Bible destructions and confiscations testifies to the widespread distribution of the bible during those early years." (Brake, 66)
- Earlier Brake stated the following regarding Catholic opposition to the Wycliffe Bible:
 - "Not everyone embraced the arrival of a Bible in the English tongue. The English Catholic Church's opposition to a vernacular translation was predictable. The Authority of the priests rested solely in the church. The church's powerful hold on the laity depended on biblical ignorance. Any free use of the Bible in worship and though signaled a deep threat to the church's authority." (Brake, 63)
- Blackford Condit author of *The History of the English Bible* states the following regarding Catholic reception to the Wycliffe Bible:
 - "The English version of the Bible by Wycliffe was such an offense, that a bill was introduced into the House of Lords in 1390, to suppress it. In the course of the debate the Duke of Lancaster is reported to have said: "We will not be the dregs of all: seeing other Nations have the Law of God, which is the Law of Faith, written in their own Language. . . That he would maintain our having the Law in our own tongue against those, whoever they should be, who first brought in the Bill." He was sustained by others, and finally the "Bill was thrown out of the House." (Condit, 62-63)
- The Wycliffe translation also gave rise to the established church's intense hatred for a vernacular Bible. First, the *De heretico comburendo* (*On The Burning of Heretics*) from 1401 promised death to heretics by means of burning the offender alive. In 1408 the infamous *Constitutions* were formulated in direct response to the overwhelming reception of Wycliffe's ideas that every man should have a Bible in his own language. The *Constitutions* forbade the Sacred Latin Vulgate Bible to be translated into a common tongue without express supervision of the church.

It soon followed that translating Scriptures into English or reading the Bible in English were heretical acts.” (Brake, 47)

- “The Oxford Council summoned in 1407-8 by Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, restated the restriction of English translations. The church historian John Foxe quotes the seventh enactment:
 - “We therefore decree and ordain, that no man, hereafter, by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue, by way of a book, libel, or treatise, now lately set forth in the time of John Wycliffe, or since, or hereafter to be set forth, in part or in whole, privily or apertly, upon pain of greater excommunication, until said translation be allowed by the ordinary of the place, or, if the case so require, by the council of provincial. He that shall do contrary to this, shall likewise be punished as a favourer of error and heresy.” (Brake, 66)
- From the early 15th century, the *Constitutions* held sway over England and continued to do so at the time of William Tyndale.

Invention of the Printing Press

- Johannes Gutenberg invented his mechanical movable type printing press in Mainz, Germany, around 1440. While development began in the late 1430s, the technology was finalized by 1450, with the famous Gutenberg Bible printed between 1452 and 1455.
- Roger B. Beck and the authors of *World History: Patterns of Interaction* state the following regarding the historical impact of Gutenberg’s Press:
 - “During the 13th century, block-printed items reached Europe from China. European printers began to use block printing to create whole pages to bind into books. However, this process was too slow to satisfy the Renaissance demand for knowledge, information, and books.

Around 1440 Johann Gutenberg, a craftsman from Mainz, Germany, developed a printing press that incorporated a number of technologies in a new way. The process made it possible to produce books quickly and cheaply. Using this improved process, Gutenberg printed a complete Bible, the Gutenberg Bible, in about 1455. It was the first full-sized book printed with movable type.

The printing press enabled a printer to produce hundreds of copies of a single work. For the first time, books were cheap enough that many people could buy them. At first printers produced mainly religious works.” (Beck, 484)

- In a cutout titled “Global Impact” at the bottom of page 484 Roger B. Beck and company state the following regarding how the printing press increased book production:
 - “A copyist took five months to produce a single book. One man and a printing press could produce 500 books in the same amount of time.” (Beck, 484)

Fall of Constantinople

- Constantinople was established by Emperor Constantine as the Eastern capital of the Roman Empire in 330 AD. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the late 5th century (400s), the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople lasted for another 1,000 years. Historians have called the Eastern Roman Empire the Byzantine Empire or Byzantium. The citizens of Byzantium called themselves Romans believing that they were a continuation of the Ancient Roman Empire.
- Situated on major trade routes, Constantinople earned its wealth through the spice trade. Traders passing back and forth between Europe and Asia would inevitably pass through Byzantine controlled lands if not the city of Constantinople itself. Situated on a strategic chokepoint, the Byzantines could control access to the Black Sea through the Bosphorus Strait.
- Consequently, given its strategic importance, the city of Constantinople had been sieged 23 times, in its history, without being breached.
- In 1453, Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II, a Muslim, began an eight-week siege of the city on Monday, April 2, 1453. By 1453, the city of Constantinople was the last Christian stronghold in the East as Muslim armies had already taken all of modern-day Turkey and the bulk of the Hinter Land beyond the Bosphorus in the Balkan region of Europe.
- The Islamic conquest of Constantinople contributed to the Renaissance, as Greek scholars left the city and immigrated to Italy, bringing Greek texts with them. Greek not Latin had been the official language of the Byzantine Empire. The fall of Constantinople is one mechanism that served to introduce Byzantine Greek MSS into Europe on the eve of the Protestant Revolution during the same time frame that the printing press was invented. Another mechanism that exposed Europe to the Byzantine readings of the Greek Church before 1453 was the ministry of the Paulicians.

The Spirit of the Renaissance

- During the Renaissance people became interested in ancient culture. Knowledge from ancient Greece and Rome that had been largely lost during the Middle Ages was rediscovered. Scholars thought that ancient Greek and Roman writings could help them solve contemporary problems. (Beck, 472)
- The study of classical texts led to the creation of a new type of scholar, the humanist. Alister McGrath explains how the Renaissance usage of the term “humanism” differs from its modern connotation. McGrath writes,
 - “The term humanism has now come to mean a worldview which denies the existence or relevance of God, or which is committed to a purely secular outlook. This is not what the word meant at the time of the Renaissance. Most humanists of the period were religious, and concerned to purify and renew Christianity, rather than eliminate it.” (McGrath, 37)

- As an intellectual movement, humanists focused on human potential and achievements. Rather than trying to make classical texts agree with Christian teachings as medieval scholars had (Scholastics), humanists studied them to understand ancient Greek values. (Beck, 472) The Italian Renaissance of the Southern Europe therefore took on a more secular flavor than did the Northern Renaissance.
- In Northern Europe the ideals of the Renaissance took a more religious track and planted the seeds of the Reformation across this region of Europe.
 - “Italian humanists were very interested in reviving classical languages and classical texts. When the Italian humanist ideas reached the north, people used them to examine the traditional teaching of the Church. The northern humanists were critical of the failure of the Christian Church to inspire people to live a Christian life. This criticism produced a new movement known as Christian humanism. . . The best known of the Christian humanists were Desiderius Erasmus of Holland and Thomas More of England. . . Erasmus believed in a Christianity of the heart, not one of ceremonies and rules. He thought that in order to improve society, all people should study the Bible.” (Beck, 482)
- In terms of literature, Renaissance writers popularized the practice of writing in the vernacular or native language of the people instead of Latin.
- Taken together, these developments created an opportune yet perilous environment on the eve of William Tyndale’s ministry. The Wycliffe Bible had awakened a hunger for Scripture in the vernacular, even as the Church responded with legal prohibitions and lethal penalties. The invention of the printing press made the mass dissemination of Scripture technologically possible, while the fall of Constantinople and the rise of Renaissance humanism restored access to Greek learning and the original biblical languages. In Northern Europe, this renewal took on a distinctly religious character, calling for reform grounded in Scripture itself. Tyndale would step onto this stage as the first Englishman positioned to unite these forces—vernacular translation, Greek scholarship, and print technology—yet he would do so under the shadow of laws specifically designed to prevent precisely the work he believed God had called him to do.

The Life & Times of William Tyndale

1494-1523

- William Tyndale was born in 1494 to a prosperous yeoman family not far from Gloucestershire. David Daniell reports that the Tyndale family was a well-connected family of some prominence.
 - “The Tyndales were well connected. (It is a neglected fact that William-the-translator was more elevated in his family line than any of his adversaries in England—certainly than Tunstall, Wolsey, Stokesley and More.) Recent work on the Tyndales of Gloucestershire and their close connection with the fourteenth-century Tyndales of Northampton and Norfolk produced the following comment by a genealogist in the family: “that they ere been many profitable marriage by the Tyndales is signified by the number of woman espoused [who] were daughters and heirs of knights or their nieces.” (Daniell, 140)

- William does not surface in the historical record until the age of eighteen when he entered Oxford University.
 - “The first record of him, probably when he was eighteen, from which his likely year of birth is deduced, is the University of Oxford records, which show him as William Hychyns (a family name) taking a BA as a member of Magdalen Hall on 4 July 1512. He was licensed MA on 26 June 1515, and created MA on 2 July 1515, a degree which permitted him for the first time to read theology. That this official study did not include Scriptures appalled him. Foxe records that Tyndale ‘read privily to certain students and fellows of Magdalen College some parcel of divinity, instructing them in the knowledge and truth of the scriptures.’ Erasmus, whose Oxford home some years before had been Magdalen College, and who until recently had been Lady Margaret’s Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, published in March 1516, his Latin translation of the New Testament, with the original Greek alongside. It is more than likely that it was from this influential volume that Tyndale led those private studies. Foxe states that Tyndale went to Cambridge, but no records support this.” (Daniell, 140-141)

- After completing his studies at Oxford, Tyndale returned to Gloucestershire and took a job as a tutor.
 - “Tyndale went back to Gloucestershire, at an unknown date. He became tutor to the children of Sir John and Lady Walsh at Little Sodbury Manor, a dozen miles south of the district of his birth. . . It is probable that he used his time to study and even begin to translate into English, Erasmus’s Greek New Testament.” (Daniell, 141)

- While there is no positive historical proof that Tyndale began his English translation while working in the Walsh household, there is substantial evidence that it was on his mind to do so.
 - “Which thing only moved me to translate the New Testament. Because I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to establish 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; for else, whatsoever truth is taught them, these enemies of all truth quench it again. . . While I am sowing in one place, the enemy ravage the field I have just left. Oh, if Christians possessed the Holy Scriptures in their own tongue, they could of themselves withstand these sophists.” (Condit, 97-98)

- Tradition reports that it was during his time in the Walsh household that Tyndale had the following famous encounter with a Catholic priest:
 - Priest—“It would be better to be without God’s law than the pope’s.”

 - Tyndale—“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, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.” (Daniell, 142)

- Run-ins such as this made it difficult for the Walsh family to retain Tyndale in their employ. Joseph Bosworth, in the Preface to *The Gospels: Gothic, Anglo-Saxon, Wycliffe and Tyndale Versions Arranged in Parallel Columns*, states that following about why Tyndale left Gloucestershire for London:
 - “. . . at whose house Tyndale held many disputes on religious subjects with the clerical dignitaries of the neighborhood, who frequented Sir John’s table. This brought him into much danger, that he deemed it prudent to leave the country and go to London.” (Bosworth, xxiv)
- Tyndale’s move to London was a calculated one, he hoped to secure a patron who would support his desire to translate the Bible into English. Previously, Tunstall the Bishop of London had been praised by Erasmus for his great learning.
 - “. . . Tyndale came to London, hoping to find a patron in Bishop Tonstal [Tunstall], since he remembered that Tonstal was highly extolled by Erasmus for his great learning. So long as the revival of learning confined itself to classical literature, Tonstal, like Sir Thomas More, was a friend of the movement; but since it was opening wide the door of Protestantism, he was no longer its friend. Consequently, in his house there was no place for Tyndale. . .” (Condit, 98)
- David Daniell concurs with Condit regarding the relationship between Tyndale and Bishop Tunstall:
 - “Tyndale, already with the vocation to print the New Testament in English, and needing permission, hoped to be supported by Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of London. Tunstall had been highly praised by Erasmus, with whom he worked in the Low Countries on the second edition of his Greek New Testament, lending him a Greek manuscript and consulting others. He had been at Oxford with Colet, Linacre and More (who singles him out for praise at the opening of his *Utopia*) and was known throughout Europe as a mathematician and classicist. Tyndale, probably arriving in London in the spring of 1523, had a letter of introduction from Sir John Walsh to Sir Henry Guildford, Henry VIII’s Controller and Master of the Horse, and he himself wrote to an old friend in Tunstall’s service, William Hebilthwayte. All to no end: Tunstall replied as Tyndale wrote, “his house was full. [. . .] I [. . .] understood at last [. . .] that there was no room in my Lord of London’s place to translate the new testament. . .

Tunstall, in the summer of 1523, was occupied in Parliament, the first for eight years: though he snubbed Tyndale, it is observable that he did not persecute him. Tyndale stayed in London for almost a year. Foxe records him preaching in St. Dunstan’s-in-the-West in Fleet Street. His sermons have not survived. St. Dunstan’s apparently had connections with the growing reform movement, with the Poyntiz family and with merchants in the cloth trade, particularly Humphrey Monmouth, who took Tyndale into

his house, where he ‘studied most part of the day and of the night, at his book.’ Tyndale, by now realizing that “to translate the New Testament [. . .] there was no place in all of England,” left for Germany probably in April 1524; the London merchants who supported him at this time included Monmouth, who was therefore in serious trouble in May 1528.” (Daniell, 142-143)

- Unfortunately for Tyndale, the devoutly Catholic Henry VIII had occupied the throne of England since 1509. In 1520 or 1521 depending on the source, Henry (or someone from his court, probably Sir Thomas More) wrote a stinging tract attacking Luther’s ideas. In recognition of Henry’s support, the pope gave him the title “Defender of the Faith.” (Beck, 492; Jones, 115)
- As noted above, following the Catholic party line, Bishop Tunstall refused to let Tyndale translate the Greek New Testament into simple English.
 - “Tyndale realized it would be impossible to translate the Bible in English. It has been more than a century since the enactment of the *Constitutions* at Oxford in 1408 forbade the reading of any non-approved English Bible. Neither Bishop Tunstall nor Cardinal Wolsey made any attempt to authorize the reading or translating of any Bible other than the Latin. The Bishops were unrelenting in their attempts to enforce the *Constitutions*. . .

Tyndale had two choices. He could remain in London and wait for better days or leave his beloved England and translate elsewhere. His enthusiasm and burden to see even the plowboy have the Scriptures in his language dictated against postponement. The only option was to set sail for Germany. After all, Germany was a hotbed of the Reformation and there he could find sympathizers and proceed unhindered in his work.” (Brake, 96-97)

1524

- In response, Tyndale fled to the Lutheran provinces in Germany where he could work on his translation without interference. (Jones, 799)
 - “Tyndale arrived in Hamburg, Germany, in the midst of Luther’s Reformation in May 1524 ... People were even reading the Bible in the German language followed by theological discussion of the current issues of the day. What a contrast to Tyndale’s England!” (Brake, 97)
- Bible collector and historian Donald L. Brake reports the following regarding any potential relationship between Luther and Tyndale:
 - “Some zealous scholars, fearful that Tyndale may have leaned too heavily on Luther, deny that Tyndale ever met him. However, little question remains among most scholars that Tyndale did visit Luther in Wittenberg ... It was while living in Wittenberg, where the university provided all the necessary scholarly tools, that Tyndale translated all or most of the New Testament. Tyndale certainly consulted the New Testament Luther had

translated into German. It does not follow, however, that Tyndale's New Testament was an English translation of Luther's German New Testament. Tyndale was probably more competent in Greek and Hebrew than Luther, and his German was limited." (Brake, 97)

1525

- In August of 1525, Tyndale settled in the German city of Cologne, with his new assistant William Roye. With the translation of the New Testament into English now complete; the next task was to ensure its printing and distribution. They chose to produce the work at the printing house of Peter Quentell. (McGrath, 72)
 - "However, Quentell's presses were also producing the works of Johannes Cochlaeus, a noted opponent of Luther, who happened to learn of Tyndale's project. It seems that some of Quentell's printers became drunk in a public tavern one evening, and let slip that there were thousands of Lutheran New Testaments being produced in English right under the noses of the Catholic authorities. Word of this soon reached Cochlaeus, who was no fool, and could see his star rising in the German Catholic firmament if he were to expose and block this project. He arranged for a raid on Quentell's presses. Tyndale and Roye, however, managed to escape and salvage at least some of their printing, along with the text of the translation. . . Undeterred, they moved their printing operation farther up the Rhine to the city of Worms, and began the tedious process all over again using the presses of Peter Schoeffer." (McGrath, 72)
- Not only did Cochlaeus have Quentell's presses shut down, he also, according to Condit notified King Henry VIII of Tyndale's clandestine activities:
 - "Cochlaeus took immediate steps to inform the public authorities, and through an order from the senate the press was stopped. He likewise, by letters, warned Henry VIII and his councilors, and directed them to give order to every seaport to prevent the introduction of the baneful merchandise. Anticipating any further action of the senate, Tyndale hastens to the printers, and securing his manuscripts and pages already printed, escapes the net of fowler by fleeing the city. We next hear of Tyndale at Worms, where, without further opposition, he succeeds in his long cherished design." (Condit, 100)
- It was long believed that all the original text printed in Cologne had been lost. However, in 1834, eight of these original sheets were discovered bound into another work. These sheets help us to gauge the influence of Luther upon Tyndale's work.
 - "The pages include a "prologue," which is dependent at points upon Luther's own prologue to his 1522 German New Testament. This was not included in the 1526 printing of Tyndale's work, . . .

The list of contents of the New Testament follows a convention that existed within Lutheran circles at this stage, which regarded four New Testament works—Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation—as being of dubious authenticity. These were placed at the

end of the contents, and not numbered. Tyndale appears to have been obliged to follow this convention by Peter Quentell himself. The 1526 printing abandoned this convention.

The 1525 printing included marginal notes. The pages that have survived included ninety such notes, suggesting that Tyndale envisaged a high level of comment on the text throughout the New Testament. The general style and tone of these notes is Lutheran. Some are cribs of Luther's own notes . . . There are no such notes in the 1526 edition." (McGrath, 72-73)

- Given that Tyndale's actions were made known to the English authorities, many Bible historians believe that this prompted Tyndale to alter the size and contents of his Bible.
 - "The explanation seems to be, that while Tyndale intended the quarto edition should be the first printed, and so the work was actually begun at Cologne, yet, because it was interrupted and the English authorities were instructed particularly as to the character of the book issuing from the press at Cologne, he changed the form to an octavo, leaving out the prologues and glosses." (Condit, 101)
- Altering the project may have given Tyndale's Bible a fighting chance of surviving introduction into England. A dated letter (March 1526) from King Henry VIII to Martin Luther reveals that the English King had knowledge of Tyndale's clandestine project.
 - ". . . in deuyce with one or two lewd persons (referring to Tyndale and Roye) borne in this our realm, for the translating of the New Testament in to English, as well as with many corruptions of that holy text, as certain prefaces, and other pestilent glosses in the margins for the advancement and setting forth of his abominable heresies. . . In the aduoydyng whereof, we of our especial tender zeal . . . determined the said venture translations to be burned, with further sharp correction and punishment against the keepers and reads of the same." (Arber, 48-49.)

1526

- "The first printed New Testament in the English language was completed in Worms in 1526 in a small octavo edition." (Brake, 100) David Daniell chronicles how the 1526 Worms New Testament differed from the one Tyndale attempted to produce in Cologne the year before.
 - "Tyndale and Roye arrived, probably late in 1525, in the safe Lutheran city of Worms, and the small printer Peter Schoeffer undertook an English New Testament, the first ever made, completed in 1526. This is very different from the Lutheran Cologne fragment. It was octavo (pocket-size like all Tyndale's books printed in his lifetime) and without Prologue or marginal notes, or attribution to him. This "bare text" had impact enough. Smuggled down the Rhine and into English and Scottish ports in bales of cloth, copies circulated quickly. For the first time, the whole New Testament, faithfully translated from the Greek could be read by anyone. That this immediately alarmed the English authorities is amply testified." (Daniell, 144)

- The difficulties and dangers involved in getting Tyndale’s New Testament into England were almost as great as those which lay in the way of their distribution. The clergy opposed the new translation with all their might. Sir Thomas More was one who wrote violently against it. (Broadbent, 248)
- Perhaps it was Tyndale’s decision to alter his original plans by altering the size and contents of his Bible but Blackford Condit reports that the initial shipment of New Testaments for Germany avoided detection and arrived safely in London.
 - “The English merchants abroad who had to do with the introduction of this newly printed Testament into England, were aware that the public authorities had been warned by Cochlaeus, and of the consequent difficulties to be overcome. But notwithstanding the impending danger, five Hanseatic merchants took the precious books into their ships, and sailed for London. They expected to find the enemy on guard, but instead, the way was open and the books were landed and safely conveyed to the Merchant’s warehouse in Thames Street. If the enemy slept, the friends of the bible were awake and expectant. Not only in London, but in Oxford and Cambridge, they anxiously awaited the coming of the newly printed English Testaments. . . Thus the way was fully prepared, and from the first the people received these newly printed Testaments joyfully, but, from necessity, secretly.” (Condit, 104)
- Condit identifies Thomas Garret as the first distributor of the Tyndale New Testament in England.
 - “The first distributor of these testaments was Thomas Garret, curate of Honey Lane, London. He was a plain man, timid in disposition, but bold in faith, whose preaching was an offense to the hierarchy but a joy to the people. From the Merchants’ warehouse these New Testaments were taken to the house of Garret. Other places of deposit were afterwards found, but the “dark corners” of Garret’s house were the first hiding places of these lights, which must soon light up all England. So there were others who afterwards engaged, at the risk of personal liberty, in distributing, by sale, the precious volumes, yet as the story comes to us, Thomas Garret was the first to do so, and first to suffer. The books came into his possession, probably in the early part of the year 1526. He proceeds cautiously in his work, selling to priest and laymen alike, but in every case with a special charge: “that they would keep it close.” How the good news must have spread . . . that a printed New Testament in English could be bought of Thomas Garret, in Honey Lane, near Cheapside. . .” (Condit, 104)
- Once introduced to the English people, it did not take the authorities long to figure out what was going on.
 - “While Thomas Garret, Father Hacker and others are diligent in distributing these Testaments in London, Cambridge, and other places, the hierarchy is on the alert. It has

examined these books and has determined to condemn them, and all such persons as have to do with them. Bishop Tunstall, by advice of Cardinal Wolsey, sent forth an injunction to the archdeacons on his diocese, under the date of October 24, 1526, for the calling in of New Testament translated by Tyndale; enjoining, “that within XXX days space . . . under pain of excommunication and incurring the suspicion of heresy, they do bring in and really deliver unto our vicar general, all the singular such books as contain the translations of the New Testament into the English tongue.” (Condit, 105)

- Brake reports the following regarding the actions Bishop Tunstall engaged in to subdue Tyndale’s New Testament in October 1526. Around this time (October or November 1526) Bishop Tunstall preached a sermon at Paul’s Cross in which he told people that there were three thousand errors in Tyndale’s translation and during which it was officially denounced and publicly burnt. (Condit, 105)
 - “In October 1526, Bishop Tunstall, the champion defender of the *Constitutions* [the formal action of the English church taken against Wycliffe and the Lollards in the early 1400s], began confiscating the New Testaments as they were smuggled into England. Public burnings of the copies and punishment of all offenders blackened the spirits of the masses.” (Brake, 105)

1527-1528

- Public renunciations and burnings could not stop the juggernaut that was the Tyndale New Testament:
 - “But if now the New Testaments of Tyndale are burned, for every book thus destroyed hundreds of others will arise from its ashes. Already Dutch printers had taken up the work of printing English Testaments as a commercial enterprise. Christopher Endhoven printed an edition in 1527, at Antwerp; two other editions by Ruremond following in 1528, so that English Testaments became plentier and cheaper. The years 1527 and 1528 were remarkable for the large number of New Testaments imported into England. The authorities were perplexed. They decided to purchase all the books printed and thus stop their circulation.” (Condit, 106)
- The following passage from Brake indicates that lengths that Tunstall was willing to go to ensure that Tyndale’s Bible was not available for sale and distribution within England.
 - “A popular story tells how Tunstall began using merchants to purchase copies on the Continent to slow down the supply. Augustine Pakington, a London businessman, was one such merchant. Pakington met with Tyndale to inform him of the plot, believing that the bishop had overstepped his prerogative. To his surprise, Tyndale met the news with enthusiasm. He encouraged Pakington to do as Tunstall commanded. Tyndale felt the burning of “God’s Word” would gain popular condemnation, and the profits from the sale could enable him to relieve his debt and provide for future revisions.

Tunstall's plot for destruction utterly failed. New Testaments continued to pour into England, and the demand increased at an alarming rate. In fact, pirated copies were circulating and selling in England with very little fear of consequences. Tyndale had a "London Times" bestseller on his hands." (Brake, 100)

- Unable to stop the importation and sale of Tyndale's New Testament within England, the authorities turned their attention to the persecution of those possessing the word of God in English.
 - "In 1528, persecution began in earnest. Wolsey's agents abroad are instructed to search out and arrest Tyndale the chief doer of this mischievous work. At home the prisons are already filled to the full with those whose only crime is that of reading the New Testament in English." (Condit, 107)
- While in Germany, Tyndale was further exposed to the emerging doctrine of the Reformation. "Tyndale's movements for some years after 1526 are unrecorded, but that all his work from 1528 was published in Antwerp implies that he was living in or near that thriving port, which had strong trade connections with England and many good printers." (Daniell, 146) Such exposure to Reformation theology served to harden Tyndale's anti-Catholic position on matters of doctrine. Latourette and Daniell report the following:
 - "While on the continent Tyndale moved further over to the Protestant position. In 1528 he issued *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* in which he came out flatly for justification by faith, and took over most of the text of a sermon by Luther on the unjust steward" (Latourette, 799)
 - "On 8 May 1528, Tyndale's *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* was published, in his customary small octavo. It soon appeared in the records of the much-sharpened interrogations in England which it proved, and was officially banned as heretical on 24 May 1530. Following a sermon by Luther, Tyndale develops his exposition of the parable in Luke 16, known since as that of the Unjust Steward, to show that that New Testament thing that though good works are important, they come naturally only from true faith, as fruit come from a tree. Over-emphasis on works leads only to superstition." (Daniell, 146)
- Later in 1528, on October 2, Tyndale penned his most influential work outside of his Bible translations titled *The Obedience of a Christian Man*. In this work, Tyndale set forth for the first time the two fundamental principles of the English reformers: "the supreme authority of Scriptures in the Church, and the supreme authority of the king in the state." (Daniell, 147)
 - "The first sentence of his book (after a blessing) is 'Let it not make thee despair neither yet discourage thee O reader, that it is forbidden thee in pain of life and good or that it is

made breaking of the King's peace or treason unto His Highness to read the word of thy souls' health.'

. . . Tyndale was a master of English prose: his attacks make exhilarating reading, and his sympathy with the existential human condition can be moving. Like *Mammon*, the *Obedience* was widely read and immediately banned (the bishops found and published fifty-four articles of heresy in them) appears in the records of interrogation of humble people." (Daniell, 146-147)

- Meanwhile, back in England, in his *Acts and Monuments*, John Foxe records the fate of many of these people who became enemies of the state for the sole crime of possessing God's word in English. In order to stem the tide of heresy the Catholic Church moved against the fountainheads of the English Bible by seeking to stop the presses of the Dutch printer Christopher Endhoven. Residing at Antwerp, a free city, Endhoven enjoyed the protections of citizenship which prevented English authorities from arresting him without permission of the court. Once in court, the case against Endhoven was thrown out thereby thwarting English attempts to silence his press. (Condit, 111)
- Also, in 1528, Sir Tomas More, already a seasoned opponent of Luther in Latin, was permitted by Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London, to read heretical books in English in order that they might attack Tyndale.
 - "In June 1529 appeared More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, in the third book of which Tyndale's New Testament is demolished as heresy, and Tyndale himself vilified as worse than Luther. At bottom, More asserts that Tyndale's offence has been to give the people Paul in English. . ." (Daniell, 149)
- Tyndale responded in his 1531 piece, *An Answer unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, in which he asserted the following:
 - "His authority is the New Testament. He condemns the Church, so absolutely defended by More, for having perverted Scripture, and for the many corruptions of his day (on which More, he notes, was silent). . . More answered Tyndale's answer with his enormous *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, almost two thousand pages, of which the first three books were published in 1532, and a year later the remaining six: all but the fifth book (against Robert Barnes) attack Tyndale." (Daniell, 149)

1529

- 1529 saw the employment of new strategy on the part the Catholic Church to stop the incursion of Tyndale's Bible into England:
 - "Failing in their attempts to stop the work of printing and importing New Testaments by persecution, the English government sought the same end by treaty: which stipulate that

there should be the continuation of traffic for merchants between the two counties, but there should be no printing or selling of Lutheran books on either side. This treaty was signed at Cambrai in 1529. Bishop Tunstall, Sir Thomas More, and the agent Hacket were the commissioners. But after all they had more confidence in fire than in treaties; Tunstall, on his return to Cambrai stopped in Antwerp for the purpose of buying New Testaments that he might burn them.” (Condit, 112)

1530

- The ascension of Sir Thomas More to the seat of Chancellorship in the English government in 1530 unleashed the most strident round of persecution to date against the English Bible.
 - “The year 1530 brought with it changes for the worse. Cardinal Wolsey, in which opinion “heresy was an error,” and who by his leniency made it possible for those thus charged to recant, was degraded from his authority; while Sir Thomas More, in which opinion “heresy was a crime,” was exalted to the high seat of the chancellorship. And Sir Thomas as chancellor used his authority in concert with the Romish bishop to blot out the very name of heresy. Also the effect of the kings fierce proclamation of December 24, 1529, for the abolishing of New Testaments, and other heretical books, and for the withstanding for all who taught or preached against the dignity and ordinances of the Catholic Church, began to be felt. “There ensued,” says Foxe, “great persecution and trouble against the poor and innocent flock of Christ.” Tunstall kindled a great fire of New Testaments in London on the 4th of May, 1530. But the people were indignant. They remonstrated to no effect; but denounced it as “a burning of the Word of God.”” (Condit, 113)
- Amidst the chaos at home in England, 1530 also saw Tyndale translate and publish the Pentateuch into English.
 - “The hierarchy is still on the alert for the apprehension of William Tyndale. Vaughan, the English envoy and successor of Hacket, has a special commission to watch Tyndale’s movements. In the meantime, Tyndale has been engaged in translating the Pentateuch, aided doubtless by his friend Fryth, who, at the persecution at Oxford, fled across the sea. These five books were printed separately [David Daniell adds that they could also be bought together. (Daniell, 147)], with titles and prologues to each, but without dates, excepting that of Genesis. . . These books are quite rare, since there is but one complete set known, which is preserved in the Grenville Library, British Museum.” (Condit, 114-115)
 - “The original Hebrew text of the Pentateuch (or of anything) was in English for the first time. Instead of *Fiat lux, et facta est lux*, Tyndale gave us ‘Let there be light, and there was light,’ and the name of God as Jehovah.” (Daniell, 148)

- According to David Daniell, 1530 also saw Tyndale publish the short work titled *The Practice of Prelates* which attacked the Roman hierarchy for its stranglehold on English society as well as argued against King Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The same year, *A Pathway to the Holy Scriptures* was also published.
 - “In about 1530, Tyndale expanded his Prologue to the 1525 Cologne Fragment to make a small, short, book, *A Pathway to the Holy Scriptures*, as a guide to the New Testament to be read alongside his unannotated 1526 Worms volume. Pathway expounds the central doctrines of Paul in Romans.” (Daniell, 150)

1531

- Blackford Condit calls 1531 a “fiery year” for the supporters of the English Bible.
 - “Fires are just now kindling in England for men as well as New Testaments. During this fiery year, 1531, Thomas Bilney, “the sainted Bilney” as he was justly called, was the first to burn at the stake. Among thirty-four questions which were put to him when on trial the fifteenth reads: “Whether they would have the Masses and Gospel openly to be read in Churches in the vulgare tongue, rather than in the Latin tongue.” This was a test question. It was death to answer in the affirmative. And how firmly and nobly Bilney answered it. In reply he said, “he would wish that the Gospels and Epistles should be read in English. For I would (saith Paul) rather have verses words, etc. that the church might be edified.” (Condit, 116)
- In September of 1531 Tyndale published *An Exposition Upon the First Epistle of John*:
 - “This is a section-by-section unfolding of John, with the decorum of a quieter tone, even in his demands for righteous love. Tyndale does, however, expound John’s ‘Little children, beware of images,’ with extended mockery of the worship of saints and their statues.” (Daniell, 150)

1533

- Two years later in 1533, Tyndale penned *Exposition upon V, VI, VII Chapters of Matthew* (the Sermon on the Mount passage) “in which Tyndale contrasts the words of Christ in restoring the true meaning of God’s commandments—works resulting from faith—with many corrupt practices of the Church.” (Daniell, 150)

1534

- In 1534, while residing in the home of Thomas Poyntz, an English merchant residing in Antwerp, Tyndale moved to revise his New Testament. This same Dutch printer moved to publish another edition when they were notified of Tyndale’s pending revision. Undeterred, the Dutch moved forward with their edition publishing in August 1534 with certain “fanciful alterations” thereby

creating confusion amongst the English as to which edition was the real revision of Tyndale when his was released in November 1534.

- “In 1534, the widow of Christopher Van Endhoven (who had died in London, imprisoned for printing and shipping English Bibles) asked an English scholar living in Antwerp, George Joye, to oversee another addition, as the Flemish typesetters were not doing well. This he did. He also took the opportunity to make silent alterations to Tyndale’s work. In particular, he altered Tyndale’s English word ‘resurrection,’ to make it ‘the life after this life’ and variations. Not to put his name to the changes was bad enough, but in 1533 the Resurrection was the subject of debate among the English reformers.” (Daniell, 151)
- In an attempt to stave off confusion, Tyndale included the following title page on his revised November edition:
 - “The New Testament diligently corrected and compared with the Greek by William Tyndale and finished in the year of our Lord God a. M.D. & XXXIII in the month of November.” (Condit, 119)
 - “He wrote for it a long Prologue about translation, explaining among other things the importance of appreciating the Hebrew influence on New Testament Greek, something not widely understood before. He also wrote a second Prologue, ‘W.T. yet once more unto the Christian reader,’ in which he strongly attacked George Joye for his impertinence. Tyndale defends his own translation, and adds that Joye is free to come up with his own ideas, as long as he puts his own name on them.” (Daniell, 151)

1535

- 1535 saw Tyndale revise his translation of the New Testament for the second time. Like the previous year, there were once again two issues, thereby creating some confusion.
 - “One of these had the monogram G.H. (1535-1534 G.H.) attached to the second title. This is probably the genuine Tyndale, since its readings were adopted by Rogers in the Matthew’s Bible. It was doubtless selected by him as Tyndale’s last and best work. Through Matthew’s Bible the readings of this edition of Tyndale passed into King James’ Bible. The other issue of 1535 was doubtless a pirated edition, and is marked by a peculiar orthography. This peculiarity in spelling is explained by Mr. Offer and others as having been adopted intentionally by Tyndale in his attempt to adapt the text to the common people, in the fulfillment of his pledge to give the New Testament to the uneducated their own tongue. But a more probable explanation is, that this false orthography was the result of Flemish pronunciation of the English language.” (Condit, 131-132)
- As noted earlier, in 1530 Tyndale translated and released the five books of Moses separately each with its own title page. In 1534 they were all bound together and reissued in a stand-alone volume. As far as the rest of the Old Testament is concerned, Condit reports:

- “The book of Jonah was translated by Tyndale in 1531, but was not reprinted. There has been some doubt as to how much of the Old Testament Tyndale translated. Hall, the chronicler, claims that beside the New Testament and the Pentateuch, he completed the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, the two books of Chronicles, Nehemiah, and the first book of Esdras, and the Prophet Jonah. But whatever Tyndale may have left behind in manuscript, he only published besides the New Testament, the Pentateuch and the book of Jonah. That Tyndale translated directly from the Hebrew and that he was a master of that language, there is no longer any question.” (Condit, 132-133)
- With the help of a spy sent from England named Henry Philipps, Tyndale was captured in Belgium on the 21st of May, 1535.
 - “In the spring of 1535, however, a debauched and villainous young Englishman wanting money, Henry Philipps, insinuated himself into the English House and Tyndale’s trust, pretending interest in the work of Bible translation, and borrowing money from him. Philipps had gambled away money entrusted to him by his father to give to someone in London, and, full of self-pity, had fled abroad. He promised someone in authority, it is not known whom, that he could betray Tyndale, Barnes, and Joye, for cash. On the morning of 21 May 1535, having arranged for the imperial officers to be ready, Philipps tricked Tyndale into leaving the English House. In the alley he was seized. . . Tyndale was taken at once to the procurer-general, who immediately raided Poyntz’s house and took away all Tyndale’s property, including his books and papers. The Old Testament historical books in English were safely somewhere else, probably with Rogers. We cannot know what further translations were removed and destroyed. Tyndale was taken to the castle of Vilvoorde, outside of Brussels, where he was incarcerated for the next sixteen months.” (Daniell, 153)
 - “The English merchants of Antwerp made every possible effort for Tyndale’s release. They applied to the Brussels court, also to the English court, and received favorable answers, and when Poyntz, who was especially active, was about to obtain letters authoring the delivering up of Tyndale, the sly and wily Philipps frustrated all, by entering a complaint against Poyntz, “that he had been a succorer of Tyndale and was one of the same opinion.” And on this charge, he had him arrested.” (Condit, 135)
- This timing proved tragic as by 1534 the political situation within England was changing. King Henry VIII’s dispute with the Pope over annulling his marriage to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, came to a head in 1533/34 with Henry leaving the Catholic Church and moving to form the Church of England (Anglican Church). It was in 1534 that the Act of Supremacy was passed by the English Parliament thereby formalizing Henry’s break from the Catholic Church.
 - “Involved as the prose was, no one, then or now, mistook the consequences: England’s church had broken from the “catholic” church; England’s church belonged to the English (or at least to the English king). For opposing this and similar moves, dedicated

Catholics like Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More would go to the block. For urging Henry on toward a more complete Reformation, dedicated Protestants like Robert Barnes and John Frith would join them.” (Noll, 178)

1536

- From his cell in 1536 Tyndale petitioned his accuser(s), “that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend my time with that study.” (Condit, 136) On the 10th of August 1536 after nearly eighteen months in prison, William Tyndale was sentenced to death.
 - “Tyndale’s crime was heresy, being a Lutheran. To his enemies he was the greatest English catch, and his downfall, it was believed would remove heresy from England, and give glory to his captors.” (Daniell, 154)
- Nearly two months later, on the 6th of October, he was executed.
 - “He was first chained to the stake, then strangled, and then burned. Just before his death, he cried out, “with a fervent zeal, and a loud voice: Lord open the King of England’s eyes.”” (Condit, 137)
- In an ironic twist of fate, Blackford Condit reports that 1536 not only saw the death of William Tyndale but the first printing of his New Testament in England.
 - “This year 1536 is the most memorable in the history of Tyndale’s life, also in the history of his translation of the New Testament; for while it witnessed the binding of the translator, it likewise witnessed the unfettering of the translation. At Antwerp the press was busy in printing edition after edition of his revised New Testament. But above all Tyndale’s New Testament is this year printed in London, which constitutes an important epoch, in that it was the first printing of the English Scriptures on English ground. This London edition was a reprint of the revised edition of 1534. It was published by Godfray, who favored the evangelical party. . . The title of this volume reads: “The New Testament . . . corrected by W. Tyndale: And in many places amended, where it escaped before by negligence of the printer . . . Newly printed in the year of our Lord MDXXXVI.” (Condit, 135-136)
- Eventually, in 1539 King Henry VIII would authorize the publication of the Great Bible, the first Bible produced under the auspices of the English crown. In the meantime, Myles Coverdale and John Rogers had remained loyal disciples of William Tyndale in the last six years of Tyndale’s life and carried the English Bible project forward after his death.

Conclusion

- William Tyndale's life and work must be understood as the product of opportune timing. He stood at the crossroads of lingering Wycliffite influence, revived Greek learning from the Renaissance, the fall of Constantinople, and the revolutionary power of the printing press. These forces uniquely prepared him to unite scholarship, vernacular English, and mass dissemination in service of Scripture.
- The English Bible emerged from conflict, not comfort. For over a century before Tyndale, church law had made vernacular Scripture a crime punishable by death. Tyndale understood from the outset that obedience to his calling would likely cost him exile and persecution. His commitment to Scripture for the common man—the ploughboy—was not rhetorical but foundational, shaping his theology, his translation philosophy, and his willingness to suffer.
- Despite relentless opposition—book burnings, confiscations, propaganda campaigns, failed treaties, and imprisonment—the Word of God could not be stopped. Every effort to suppress Tyndale's New Testament only widened its circulation and deepened its impact. Persecution served not to silence Scripture, but to accelerate its spread.
- Within a year of his execution, the king of England authorized the circulation of an English Bible largely built upon Tyndale's work. What had been condemned as heresy became the authorized Word of God for an entire nation. Tyndale's final prayer was answered swiftly and decisively, though not in the way he lived to see.
- Ultimately, Tyndale's life explains the enduring power of the English Bible. The clarity, courage, and authority of his translation were forged in suffering and steadfast faith. His life and his Bible are inseparable testimonies—together declaring that God's Word, once released into the language of the people, cannot be chained.

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