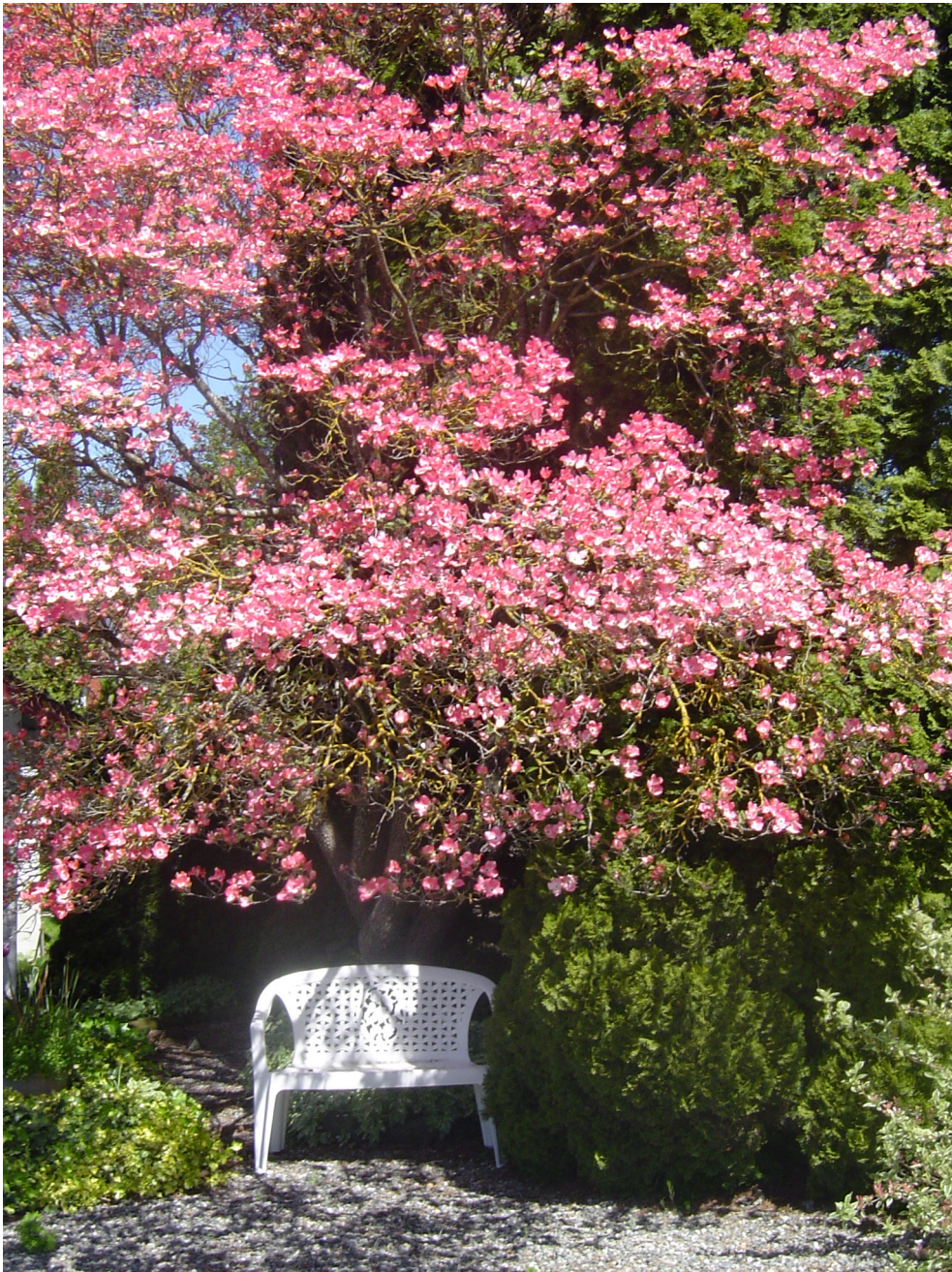

THE PENTECOST

Issue 106 February 2017



THE PENTECOST



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The Bible is the book of all books. What makes it so special? What is the story of how it came together? I encourage you to read on and marvel at the Bible's history. God Bless you.

Shawn Stevens

Have you ever wondered how the Bible came about? Who wrote it? What language was it first written in? How has it preserved over thousands of years. In this issue we will answer those questions and much more. God bless you.

Ramona Stevens

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GOD’S WORD THROUGH HISTORY

The Bible has been a faithful guide and staff, comfort and hope for multitudes throughout history. How did this great Book begin? To our knowledge, God’s first communication with man, which was written down, was called the Decologue or Ten Words, which we know as the Ten Commandments. These were given to Moses on his first mountain encounter with God. Moses then went up the mountain a second time and was given more instructions from God. This time Moses wrote down the words of the Covenant. This was the beginning of the sacred writings. 2 Those sacred writings were followed by additional sacred writings, compiled and passed down to us, all of them, in time becoming known as the Holy Bible.

The word “Bible” comes from the Greek word Biblos, which was the outer coat of a papyrus reed used in Egypt during the 11th century B.C. The plural form of this word is Biblia and it was used by Christians to describe their sacred writings as early as the 2nd century. This word was carried over into Latin and the English translation became Bible. 3 The Bible is divided into two testaments, which is another word for covenants. Its first half is called the Old Testament and its second half is called the New

Testament. The Old Testament consists of inspired Jewish writings which predate Christ’s incarnation. Probably the earliest division of this material was called The Law And The Prophets. 4 The Old Testament is a composition of historical, poetical and prophetical writings.

Why did all of this historical, poetical and prophetical material need to be written down? God had been communicating with man long before Moses’ life. However, the problem with oral and other forms of communication is that they are not preserved as accurately as a written tradition. God wanted His Word accurately recorded in written form and, at least by the time of Moses’ life, this was begun. We read in the Old Testament that “And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.” (Exodus 24.4). Moses was followed by other prophets who continued to record the Word of God.

The Bible teaches that God spoke through the prophets. Some titles that are given in the Bible for prophets are “the man of God” (See 1 Kings 12.22), “His servant” (see 1 Kings 14.18), “MY MESSENGER” (see Matthew 11.10) 4.5 , “a watchman” (see Ezekiel 3.17) and “the seers” (see Isaiah 30.10). The Bible says; “for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1.21). Again, we read that “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,” (Hebrews 1.1). The Bible claims this in many places. Also, the Ten Commandments, recorded by Moses, are prefaced with these words; “Then God spoke all these words, saying,” (Exodus 20.1). God spoke to His prophets directly, telling them what they were to say. For

example, He told the prophet Ezekiel that “But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.” (Ezekiel 2.7). The Bible emphatically states that “All Scripture is inspired by God ... ” (2 Timothy 3.16). The Bible says that the Jews were advantaged because “... that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.” (Romans 3.2). The phrase “thus sayeth the LORD” and similar expressions are found in the Old Testament 3,808 times. The Prophet Isaiah, in the first chapter of his Book declares; “Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; for the Lord speaks, ...” (Isaiah 1.2). Similarly, the Prophet Jeremiah says in his Book; “The word of the LORD came to me saying, ... ” (Jeremiah 1.11). Because of these scriptures, and others, Evangelicals use interchangeably the word “Bible” and the phrase “Word of God.”

Because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, some might assume that the whole of it would be written down in the same form. This is not true. One of the characteristics of the Bible is how God has used a variety of forms and a variety of personalities in communicating His Holy Word. Although all of the Bible’s books are inspired, one notices a difference between reading the Apostle Paul’s epistles and King David’s psalms. Similarly, one notices a difference between Moses’ historical books, such as 1 Chronicles, and John’s apocalyptic book, Revelation.

The sacred prophetic writings of the Old Testament were passed on from generation to generation. However, in 586 B.C., the Babylonians conquered the Jews and attempted to burn everything in the temple. The Jews were under Babylonian captivity for seventy years

and, at the end of this period, many returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. In God’s providence, not all copies of the sacred Scriptures were destroyed. Synagogues began springing up everywhere and they needed copies of the Scriptures. This need led to the creation of a new institution and profession, that of the scribes. Scribes zealously and meticulously went about the task of duplicating the Scriptures which were then used in the synagogues. Another significant development of this period was the rise of Alexander the Great and his conquering of the then-known world. By the time of his death, in 323 B.C., much of the world was bilingual, with Greek as its second language. Around 285 B.C., Demetrius Phalereus, the head of the library in Alexandria, inquired of the king of Egypt whether a Greek translation of the Jewish Law could be made for the library. The king consented and requested from the Jews six scholars from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to work on the translation. In seventy-two days the translation was finished and this translation is known as the Septuagint. ⁵ This seems to be the favourite translation of the early Christians.

The early Christians soon had another collection of inspired writings in addition to the Old Testament. These were the Gospels, Epistles and Apocalypse of the New Testament. With Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming to Earth the world was again infused with divine prophecy and teaching. The Bible says that “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,” (Hebrews 1.1). Jesus said on one occasion; “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not

speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.” (John 14.10). His words came with the full authority of His Heavenly Father. This is because, as He said; “ ... the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.” (John 14.24). In a prayer to His Heavenly Father, Jesus said; “ for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; ...” (John 17.8). He had given His disciples the Word of God.

Although Jesus gave His disciples the Word of God, He did not personally write down His divine teachings but, instead, this work was given to some of His disciples and certain others. At the Last Supper, He told His disciples; “ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” (John 14.26). Here, Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit will do two things. The Holy Spirit will bring to their memory all that Jesus has said to them and He will teach them all things. The Apostle Paul, operating under this same inspiration, wrote many epistles. He knew that his message came from God. He said to the Thessalonians; “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, ... ” (1 Thessalonians 2.13). Concerning his gospel, he said to the Galatian Church; “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1.11,12). To the Corinthians, he said; “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to

you, ...” (1 Corinthians 11.23). To the Thessalonian Church, he said; “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, ...” (1 Thessalonians 4.15). With these inspired records of the apostles, and certain others, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were formed. The writing of these twenty-seven books, and the acceptance of them as inspired Scripture, is an interesting chapter in Christian history. From the period of 33 A.D. to 50 A.D., emphasis was not put on a written record. This is probably because Christians believed that Christ was coming back imminently. However, by 50 A.D., Christian faith was spreading very rapidly and it was necessary for written copies of apostolic instruction to be supplied to the churches which were springing up everywhere. 6 Even though emphasis was not on a written record in the first half of the first century, there was a sorting of gospel material. Luke, the author of one of the four Gospels, dedicates his Gospel to a man named Theophilus. He opens with these words:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.
(Luke 1.1-4).

Here, we see Luke setting about the work of writing a narrative of Christ’s life and ministry. While some, like Luke, wrote gospels,

apostles, such as Peter and Paul, wrote epistles (letters). The Apostle John wrote down the prophetic Book of Revelation. During this New Testament period, one of Peter's epistles refers to Paul's epistles, giving additional credence to them (see 2 Peter 3.15-16). Apostolic epistles were circulated (see example of Colossians 4.16) and read to congregations (see example of 1 Thessalonians 5.27).

By the first half of the 2nd century, the apostles' writings were more generally known and had circulated more widely. By the second half of the 2nd century, New Testament books were even more widely recognized as Scripture. These books were organized into a single catalogue of recognized books and distinguished from other Christian literature. ⁷

In the period of time in which the New Testament was written, and for a couple hundred years afterwards, the Christian Church suffered terrible persecution. Many Christians lived in catacombs and caves. They were sometimes hunted down and many of their writings were burned. Under God's providence, the Scriptures were protected through this turbulent time. This was a mysterious period of time. The Church was young and much of what we know about its leaders is from some writings which survived from this period. Church leaders, prior to the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., are referred to as the Anti-Nicean Fathers. It would be wrong to assume that they were unanimous in their understanding of exactly what was, and what was not, holy Scripture. However, it is interesting to hear what they have to say about Scripture itself.

Many Anti-Nicean fathers did refer to New Testament Scripture and in many instances wrote down their views on

Scripture. Like Paul, Clement of Rome (1st century) wrote an epistle to the Corinthians. In it, he quotes scriptures from the Gospels, such as Matthew 9.13, Mark 2.17 and Luke 5.32. He refers to them as Scripture. In the same quote, he cites Mark 9.42 after the introductory words "God saith." In this same work, he quotes Hebrews 1.3-7. ⁸ Polycarp (1st and 2nd century), a disciple of the Apostle John, refers to the New Testament in his epistle to the Philippians. He quotes Ephesians 4.26 and introduces this verse with the words "the Scripture saith." ⁹ Justin Martyr (early 2nd century), in his first apology, written between 150 and 155 A.D., refers to the Gospels as "Voice of God." ¹⁰ Irenaeus (late 2nd and early 3rd century), in his work, "Against Heresies," also refers to the Gospels. He says; "For the Lord of all gave the power of the Gospel to His apostles through whom we have come to know the truth, that is the teaching of the Son of God ... This Gospel they first preached. Afterwards, by the will of God, they handed it down to us in the Scriptures, to be the pillar and ground." ¹¹ Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd and early 3rd century) says; "There is no discord between the Law and the Gospel, but harmony, for they both proceed from the same Author." ¹² Hippolytus (late 2nd and early 3rd century) commented on both the Old and New Testament. On the Old Testament and its writers, he said:

The Law and the Prophets were from God, who in giving them compelled his messenger to speak by the Holy Spirit, that receiving the inspiration of the Father's power they may announce the Father's counsel and will. In these men therefore the Word found a fitting abode

and spoke of Himself; for even then He came as His own herald, shewing the Word who was about to appear in the world. ... 13

Concerning New Testament writers, he said:

These blessed men ... having been perfected by the Spirit of Prophecy, and worthily honored by the Word Himself, were brought to an inner harmony like instruments, and having the Word within them, as it were to strike the notes, by Him they were moved, and announced that which God wished. For they did not speak of their own power (be well assured), nor proclaim that which they wished themselves, but first they were rightly endowed with wisdom by the Word, and afterwards well foretaught of the future by visions, and then, when thus assured, they spake that which was [revealed] to them alone by God. 14

Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, a 3rd century martyr, referred to Scripture as "Divine Scripture,"¹⁵ "Divine commands,"¹⁵ "Sacred Scriptures,"¹⁵ "Scriptures from heaven,"¹⁵ "precepts of the Divine Law,"¹⁵ "wells of divine fullness"¹⁵ and "voices of the Lord."¹⁵ These references show us how Early Church fathers viewed the Scriptures as inspired of God.

These writings may have been inspired by God, but would they survive the efforts made to destroy them? The Roman Emperor Diocletian had ordered the destruction of the Christian's sacred writings but, in God's providence, not all of the copies were destroyed. In the reign of Emperor Constantine, the Roman government reversed its position and

became friendly with Christians. Constantine even requested that Eusebius would arrange for copies of the Scriptures to be provided for the Empire's head in the East, Constantinople. 16 17 18 Eusebius did so, and had fifty copies prepared for this use. This created a further need for the sacred Scriptures to be organized into a single book. The Early Church needed a canon. The word "canon" is believed to have come originally from the Greek word *kanon*, which meant a rod, measuring rod, staff or ruler. The last usage, ruler, was expanded to include a rule or standard for anything. Early Christians used it to refer to a "rule of faith, normative writings, or authoritative Scripture." Some Early Church fathers from the time of Irenaeus referred to Christian teaching as "The Kanon of the Church," "The Kanon of the Truth," and "The Kanon of Faith." However, the first clear use of the word was by Athanasius. 19 In 367 A.D., he wrote a letter in which he lists the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. This was the first time in recorded history that we had such a list. In 397 A.D., the Council of Carthage endorsed these twenty-seven books. 20

The next major event in the history of the Bible, as a book, was the creating of the Latin Vulgate Version. The pope desired to have a standard translation of the Bible which would be accepted as authoritative by the whole Church. The skills of Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus (340-420 A.D.), better known as St. Jerome, were employed for this large work. Jerome was born in Stridon, Dalmatia, and at twelve years of age he went to Rome where he studied Latin, Greek and pagan authors for the next eight years. At age nineteen, he became a Christian. He

was later baptized by the pope of Rome and he committed himself to the service of God. For many years he lived a semi-aesthetic life. He traveled east where he learned Hebrew from a Rabbi and he was ordained to be a presbyter in the city of Antioch. He conducted more studies in Constantinople and, in 382 A.D., the pope called him to be his secretary. That same year, he was commissioned to begin the work that he is now famous for, a revision of the Latin Scriptures. He began working on the Old Testament and continued on to work on the New Testament. Soon after Jerome had revised the Latin Gospels, the pope died. Much of Jerome's work was done in Bethlehem where he also spent time improving his Hebrew. Although Jerome's work began as a revision of an older Latin text, in the end his translation of the Old Testament was translated into Latin from Hebrew manuscripts. His complete work was finished in 405 A.D. 21

What was the reaction to Jerome's translation? Some did not like him using Hebrew as a basis for his Old Testament work. They felt that the Greek Septuagint was superior. Even Augustine (354-430) was outspokenly against Jerome's Old Testament work. It is also significant that Jerome's New Testament work was rushed and was simply a minor revision of an older Latin translation. It was not done directly from Greek manuscripts. Opposition to the Vulgate Bible was offset by the pope's support for it. Before long, the Vulgate was generally accepted by the Church but there would be more revisions and editions of it. Interestingly, the Vulgate was not officially declared the standard text of the Bible for the Roman Catholic Church until the Council of Trent (1546-1563). 22 23

What was the long-term effect of the Vulgate's general acceptance throughout the Dark and Middle Ages? By insisting on reading the Bible in Latin, the leadership of the Catholic Church essentially separated the Bible from the common population of Europe. Most people in the Dark and Middle Ages could not read, let alone read in the foreign language of Latin. Neither could they understand the Scriptures that were read to them in Latin. The Bible became isolated behind the closed doors of the monasteries. For centuries, it was figuratively "chained up" from being used by common men and women. These chains would be broken by the great reformers of the Church.

It is no surprise that the breaking of the chains which separated the Bible from the people would happen in a major way in Britain. Before discussing the translating of the Bible into English, we should note that the English language has gone through a tremendous evolution throughout the centuries. Old English can be traced back to the 7th century. It was really a conglomerate of other languages. Before England had a central government, invaders settled in various sections of the island. The Jutes settled in the West. The Saxons settled in the East and the Angles settled in the centre. There was a great blending of their languages. Well-known figures, such as Geoffrey Chaucer (1340s – 1400) and John Wycliffe (1320s?-1384) were major influences in promoting what is called Middle English. 24

Some early attempts had been made to translate part of the Scriptures into English. These all used the Vulgate as a

base text. Aldhelm (640-709) is credited with translating the Psalter into Old English sometime after 700 A. D. Egbert (fl.c. 700), the archbishop of York, was called to establish a school at the court of Aachen. He was the first scholar to translate the Gospels into English (© 705). The monk, scholar and historian, known as the Bede (674-735), was one of the greatest scholars in Europe and has been called the Father of English History. He translated the Gospel of John, completing his translation in the very hour of his death. He is reported to have been chanting the word Gloria as he passed on, having completed both his translation and his life. Sadly, his translation did not survive to modern days. Alfred the Great (849-901) was the king of England between 870 and 901 A.D. and was also a first-rank scholar. He translated Bede's "Ecclesiastical History" from Latin into English. As well, he did some Bible translation work, translating into English the Ten Commandments, and extracts from Exodus 21 to 23 and Acts 15.23-29. Aelfric (fl. c. 1000) was the abbot of Eynsham, Oxfordshire. He translated sections of the first seven books of the Old Testament. 25 The language of these ancient translations was Old English, a mixture of the language of the Angles, Saxons and Frisians. 26

All of these early partial translations of the Bible into English were leading up to the most significant translation of the Middle Ages, the John Wycliffe Translation. The Old English translations were really incomprehensible to English readers of Wycliffe's day. A translation of the Bible into English was desperately needed. John Wycliffe (1320s-1384) has been called The Morning Star of The Reformation. History suggests that he

was one of the king's chaplains around 1366 A.D. and by 1372 had become a Doctor of Theology. Wycliffe taught at Oxford University, where he was esteemed as the Jewel of Oxford. Wycliffe was a reformer at heart and, with each passing day, was becoming more forthright in his objections to the many abuses of the hierarchy of the Church, such as, its neglect of the poor and its corruption of theology. In 1377, he issued nineteen articles expressing his views and this resulted in five Bulls (a papal edict) being issued against him. In 1382, he denounced the doctrine of transubstantiation and he was removed from his teaching position at Oxford. 27 What were some of the influences which galvanized him in his convictions? Wycliffe lived through the Black Plague in which one third of all Europeans died. This horrifying plague claimed the lives of many at Oxford. During 1349, the city of Oxford had three mayors, in succession. The first died while journeying to London to take his oath of office. The second didn't risk traveling to London but, instead, was sworn in by the Abbot of Oseney and both he and his successor died in office. Not only the common population but, also, the clergy were dying in large numbers. The Abbot of Frideswyde died and so did the vicars of St. Mary's, St. Ebbe's and St. Giles. An entire monastery of friars was also wiped out. From Balliol, Wycliffe had only a two-minute walk to the common trenches where victims were buried. Many scholars fled Oxford in attempts to find a safer environment away from the plague. 28 No doubt, the trauma of this event had a profound spiritual effect upon Wycliffe. His fear of God deepened and his priorities, more than ever before, were with the advancement of truth. In the

furnace of these experiences, he lost his fear of men and the backbone of one of England's greatest reformers was formed in him. At Oxford, he became a master of debate. His convictions sharpened and deepened even more. Right was right and wrong was wrong and he was determined that right would win. He could not hold in the beliefs that he knew in his heart were true, and he spoke his daring convictions in the face and fury of an angry Church. His final trial was at Oxford in 1383, where he was being judged for his views on transubstantiation. The king and parliament of England were persuaded that Wycliffe should be judged by a panel of his own peers. After giving a powerful discourse, delineating his view, he stood silent and waited for a response from the panel. The panel was also silent and when he saw that they had no instructions for him, he turned around and walked out of the meeting. This was his last day at Oxford University. 29

Although Wycliffe's time at Oxford was now over, his life and story was certainly not over. Instead, the end of one mission was the beginning of another and Wycliffe's ministry launched forward to its greatest climax. He moved to Lutterworth and, with a band of loyal followers, set out to translate the entire Bible from Latin into English. The main translators of this work were Nicholas Hereford and John Purvey, but Wycliffe carefully oversaw the project and worked tirelessly with everyone involved. There is some mystery about where they got their Latin copies to work from. A complete copy of the Latin Bible usually could only be found in the libraries of the largest abbeys, college halls and monasteries. Merton College had two copies, the Queen's College apparently had a two-

volume copy, and other libraries close to Oxford had the books of the Bible bound in separate volumes. 30

The work was not easy. The translators soon realized that the Latin vocabulary was much more restricted than the English vocabulary. This meant that a certain Latin word might serve for several words in English. 31 They continued with the painstaking process. Wycliffe taught that the Bible contained the whole of God's revelation and all other authorities, even the authority of the pope, must be tested by the Scriptures. He also maintained that all men must have access to the Scriptures. 32 Wycliffe was convinced that God had given man the Scriptures so that he would know how to think and believe, and it was the right of every man to examine the Scriptures for himself and learn how to follow God. It was not enough to leave the interpretation of the Bible to the hierarchy of the Church. The Bible had to be translated into English so that English men could read it. This was an incredible undertaking and the risks to the lives of him and his followers were great. However, Wycliffe said; "Should I live to be silent? Never. Let the blow fall. I await its coming." 33

Wycliffe's translation was begun in 1378 and by 1380 the translation of the New Testament had been completed. It would not be until 1388 (after Wycliffe's death) that the translation of the Old Testament would be finished. The value of these Bibles cannot be measured. Wycliffe's followers worked tirelessly for years and endured horrific persecution. The printing press had not yet been invented and every copy of the translation had to be written out by hand. The demand for these Bibles was huge. Some peasants

would give a load of hay just to possess the New Testament for a day. Though precious, these copies did circulate far and wide throughout England and a reformation force which could never be crushed was released in that nation.

How did the Catholic Church of Wycliffe's day react to his translation? They were infuriated, as is expressed in the words of one chronicler:

This master John Wycliffe translated from Latin into English – the tongue of the Angles, not the Angels – the scriptures that Christ gave to the priests and wise men of the church so they could minister to ignorant and weaker souls. By this translation the scriptures have become vulgar, and they are more available to lay, and even to women who can read, than they were to learned scholars, who have a high intelligence. So the pearl of the gospel is scattered and trodden underfoot by swine. 34

Wycliffe died of natural causes in 1384 but, years later, an enraged Catholic Church had his bones dug up and burned. His bones were destructible, but his work was, no doubt, eternal.

Wycliffe's followers were called the Lollards. The extent to which their influence spread in England is truly remarkable. The Catholic Church considered them very radical. The Lollards taught the priesthood of all believers, administered sacraments without authorization from the Catholic Church, preached in the vernacular of the people and were highly sympathetic to

the poor. Their influence carried through into the 1500s and became the ground-base for the English Reformation.

On June 23, 1509, the Bishop of York crowned Henry 8th king of England. At the coronation the bishop said to Henry; "Consolidate the throne. Conciliate the clergy and sacrifice the Lollards." Henry replied; "I will be the protector of the Church." 35 Under his rule, Lollards again were hunted down and subjected to horrific torture and many were burned at the stake. However, through it all Wycliffe's Bible continued to be used.

One interesting life, from this period, which played a part in the Bible's history is that of Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) of Rotterdam. When he was eleven years old, his parents died of the plague. He grew up and became an Augustinian monk. His brilliant mind gained him quite a reputation and he went on to be the most renowned leader of the northern humanists (sometimes called Christian humanists). In many ways, Erasmus was disillusioned with the Catholic Church of his day. He began expressing many reformation ideas. His book, "In Praise of Folly," taught that the Church of his day was enslaved to folly. 36 People read his writings with great interest and Rome was worried about how far his influence was spreading. In his earlier writings he made favourable comments concerning Martin Luther, but he drifted away from those feelings in his later years.

Erasmus' greatest contribution was not his humanistic teachings but, rather, his scholarly masterpiece, completed in 1516, a Greek New Testament. In 1515, he had traveled to the university library at Basle and gathered several Greek

manuscripts dating from around the 12th century. These became his main source for assembling his own Greek manuscript and, from that manuscript, he translated a new Latin text. His New Testament was in two columns, the one column being his Greek text and, the other, his Latin translation. How was this work received? There were voices within the Church hierarchy which opposed Erasmus' New Testament. Jacob Masson (1475-1544), more commonly known as Latamus, was a teacher at the college Domus pauperum in Louvain. He was known to be a conservative polemicist in defence of the papacy and leadership of the Church. He argued that Latin manuscripts were more accurate than Greek ones. He feared what a new translation would do to theology. He felt that theology had already been well mapped out and scholarship should be used to fortify established and accepted theology, not undermine the teachings of the Church. Another critic of Erasmus' work was Frans Tittlemans of Hasselt. He was a scholar who wrote a volume dealing with the Book of Romans. One key point in his book is a defence of the Vulgate. He argued that God first provided His Word to Jews, in their language, but, when they became impious, He took it and gave it to Gentiles, in Greek. Similarly, Tittleman believed that when the Greeks became schematic and divisive, God gave His Word to Latin-speaking people in their language. He felt that now that God's Word was in Latin, there was no further stage and if revisions were done, they should be based on Latin texts. Because of objections like these, Erasmus' translation was banned in most countries, however, copies were still sold secretly. Because the printing press was now in existence, it was possible to mass-

produce the Erasmus New Testament. Despite contrary views, this was an incredible resource because scholars now had much easier access to a manuscript in Greek, the original language of the New Testament documents. 37 Erasmus' Greek text became the underlying text for other translations. Martin Luther used it to make a translation into German. Ulrich Zwingli used it to make a translation into Swiss. William Tyndale used it to make a translation into English and its 4th and 5th edition became the Textus Receptus, the basis for the King James Bible. 38 39 40 41

I have said that Martin Luther used Erasmus' text to make a German translation. Martin Luther (1483-1546) is the most well-known reformer of the Protestant Reformation. He had many grievances with the Catholic Church of his day and one of them was over the Church not putting proper emphases on the Scriptures. He said; "Scripture must reign as queen, all must obey and be subject to her, not teachers, judges or arbitrators over her; but they must be simply witnesses, pupils and confessors of it, whether they be pope or Luther or Augustine or an angel from heaven."42 Everything must be subject to the Scriptures. This was Luther's sola Scriptura, that is, the belief that the Bible is the only infallible basis for theology. He said; "No doctrine in the Church can come from anywhere but the Holy Scripture; it is our only source of doctrine."43 Not only were the Scriptures the only basis for doctrine, Luther also maintained that they were inerrant. 44 It should be noted that Luther regarded the books of Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation as non-canonical, and placed

them at the end of his translation. 45

Luther's name is well-known, but so is the name of William Tyndale. Tyndale was born around 1494 in Gloucestershire, England. Little is known about his upbringing. At Oxford, he received his B.A. in 1512 and his Masters degree in 1515. There he studied the classics, became known as a scholar, and was said to have been fluent in six other languages, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish and French. He was so fluent in these languages that it has been said that, whichever one he spoke in, some believed that it was his native tongue. He also studied at Cambridge University. 46 Tyndale was filled with the reformation spirit. He soon became known for his bold denouncement of the Church's corruption and falsehood. He declared that neither the ritual of absolution nor any other sacrament could bring about the forgiveness of sin. Instead, he maintained that the forgiveness of sin came through faith and he preached repentance. He loudly and boldly called for reform. 47

There was one area of reform which Tyndale was especially zealous to see. That was the translation of the Bible into English and its distribution to English readers. The Lollards had done much to spread Wycliffe's translation, however, the process of duplicating and spreading that Bible before the days of the printing press was enormous. As well, Wycliffe's work was translated from the Latin. Now that Erasmus had produced a Greek New Testament, it was possible to translate a much more accurate copy of the holy Scriptures. The printing press would allow for the mass distribution of such a work. Tyndale's heart was filled with this dream.

Surely, this must be the next step in reforming the Church.

Along with denouncing the abuses of the Church, Tyndale began speaking about his dream of translating the Scriptures into English. It was simply unreasonable to withhold the Bible from English readers. After all, the Bible was already available in Spanish, Czech, Italian, Scandinavian and German. 48 Why not have it made available in English? Attempts were made by clergymen to dissuade Tyndale from his reformation ideas. On one occasion, Tyndale said to a priest; "The Scriptures are a clue which we must follow without turning aside until at Christ, for Christ is the end." 49 The priest responded; "The Scriptures are a labyrinth, a conjuring book, wherein everybody finds what he wants." 50 Tyndale replied; "You read them without Jesus Christ; that is why they are an obscure book to you, a thicket of thorns where you only escape from the briars to be caught in the brambles." 51 The priest answered back; "Nothing is obscure to us; it is we [the Church] who give the Scriptures, and we who explain them to you." 52 Tyndale replied with this lengthy quote:

Do you know who taught the eagles to spy out their prey? Well, that same God teaches His hungry children to spy out their Lord and trace out the paths of His feet and follow ... His elect know [H]im, but the world knows Him not. And as for you, far from having given us the Scriptures, it is you who have hidden them from us; it is you who burn those who teach them and if you could you would burn the Scriptures themselves." 53

It was Tyndale, not the leadership of the Catholic Church, who longed to give the common people the Scriptures. By spying out the Lord and tracing His paths, Tyndale found himself preaching from village to village and from town to town. When he preached in a large meadow in Bristol, the local priest called him a heretic and threatened to expel from the Church those who went to hear him. 54 Although many clergymen wanted Tyndale to appear before an ecclesiastical court, in his early days they could not find anyone willing to give evidence against him.

Tyndale continued to press his reformation ideas. One day a clergyman, a learned doctor of the Church, was conversing with Tyndale and, in defending the papacy, said; "We were better be without God's law than the Pope's." 55 To this, Tyndale responded with perhaps his most famous quote; "I defy the Pope and all his laws; and, if God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that drives a plow to know more of the Scriptures than you do." 56

To get an English Bible into the hands of English plowboys would be a tremendous task. Tyndale could see that he was in great danger of being arrested and fled from Sodbury to London. The bishop of London was Cuthbert Tunstall who himself was a Greek and Latin scholar. Tyndale hoped that Tunstall would give him a place to stay and approval to do his translation work. Tunstall declined from getting involved. 57

Though Tunstall would not help Tyndale, a wealthy merchant in Tyndale's congregation decided that he would. Tyndale was allowed the use of the

merchant's home and his library and, for a short time, conducted his translation work there. However, waves of persecution were sweeping over England as the Catholic Church was trying to root out the beginnings of the English Reformation. Tyndale decided to flee England for the continent of Europe and, sometime in 1524-1525, he left London for Hamburg. Tyndale went underground and it is very difficult to trace his movements during this stage of his life. It is believed that he spent time in Wittenberg, where he probably met Luther. He surfaced in Cologne with his own translation of the New Testament, partially done, which he began printing. When this was discovered by Catholic authorities, the printer was ordered to stop and Tyndale narrowly escaped, not only with a bulk of printed New Testament material, but with his life. It is believed that he fled to the city of Worms. 58

Sometime near the close of 1525 or, possibly, early 1526, Tyndale had completed two editions of the New Testament and he had found a printer, Peter Schaefer, to begin printing them. In 1526, Tyndale's New Testaments began coming into England via Antwerp and Rotterdam. They were hidden in bales of cloth, received in London, and sold. Many who were involved in this work were captured and even tortured or burned. A leading churchman, Sir Thomas More, began writing against Tyndale. 59

Not only was More against Tyndale, so was King Henry 8th. King Henry made arrangements with the emperor [German] for Tyndale to be hunted down and captured. 60 In the early 1530s, King Henry was involved in a personal conflict with the pope over Henry's wishes to

divorce and remarry. This conflict escalated to the point where King Henry caused the English Church to break away from the Roman Catholic Church and be placed under the headship of King Henry himself. During this time, Henry thought that perhaps it would be helpful to employ Tyndale to write against the papacy. This request was brought to Tyndale, who was wary of accepting the offer. Tyndale was now working on a translation of the Old Testament. He was asked a second time to come to England but he said that he would not unless King Henry allowed the Scriptures to be published in English and freely distributed. Henry was enraged at Tyndale's refusal and Tyndale remained a hunted man. 61

The hunt became especially treacherous as a man named Henry Philipp was paid to find Tyndale, befriend him, and then betray him to the authorities. Philipp did find and befriend Tyndale and, after inviting Tyndale to go with him for dinner, had Tyndale seized while walking through one of the narrow alleys in the city of Antwerp. He was taken out of Antwerp to the Castle of Vilvorde, near Brussels. In August of 1536, he stood before an ecclesiastical court and was sentenced to death. On Friday the 6th of October, 1536, he was both strangled and burned at the stake. 62 While fastened to the stake, his last words were; "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." 63

Why was the Catholic Church so opposed to Tyndale translating the Bible into English? These were the days of the Reformation and their authority was being challenged like never before. Reformers were calling the Church to answer to the spiritual authority of the Scriptures themselves. This was a battle over who was the higher authority, the Roman

Catholic Church or the holy Scriptures. Thomas More objected to the translation on three grounds. Firstly, he regarded the Scriptures as being an incomplete source of divine revelation. To him the Scriptures must not be divided from the broader traditions of the Church community. Secondly, he believed that the Church existed prior to the Scriptures and, therefore, no one could understand the Scriptures except they be instructed by the Church. Thirdly, the Scriptures contained numerous difficult passages which required interpretation. 64 More said; "We must not examine the teaching of the Church by Scripture, but understand Scripture by means of what the Church says." 65 Tyndale replied to this saying; "Is the Church before the Gospel, or the Gospel before the Church? Is not the father older than the son? God begat us with his own will, with the Word of Truth." 66 Leaders of the Catholic Church maintained that English New Testaments had been corrupted and were mixed with heresies. Tunstall wrote to his archdeacons a complaint that the gospel in the common language had been mixed with:

... certain articles of heretical depravity and pernicious erroneous opinions, pestilent, scandalous, and seductive of simple minds ... of which translation many books, containing the pestilent and pernicious poison in the vulgar (common) tongue, have been dispersed in great numbers throughout our diocese; which truly, unless it be speedily foreseen will without doubt infect and contaminate the flock committed to us, with the pestilent poison and the deadly disease of heretical depravity. 67

While Tyndale was defending the English translation, Thomas More argued that it was difficult to translate the Scriptures from one language to another, and especially difficult to try to translate them into the English language. The following quote is from Tyndale responding to this criticism:

They will say it [the Bible] cannot be translated into our tongue, it is so rude. It is not so rude as they are false liars. For the Greek tongue agreeth more with the English than with the Latin. And the properties of the Hebrew tongue agreeth a thousand times more with the English than with the Latin. The manner of speaking is both one, so that in a thousand places thou needest not but to translate it in to the English word for word when thou must seek a compass in the Latin & yet shall have much work to translate it well-favouredly, so that it have the same grace and sweetness, sense and pure understanding with it in the Latin as it hath in the Hebrew. A thousand parts better may it be translated into the English than into the Latin. 68

Thomas More went further in his accusations by judging Tyndale's motive as being deceptive. He said of Tyndale's Bible, in the language and spelling of his day; "In which translayon he (Tyndale) purposely corrupted that holy texte melycyously plantyng therein suche wordys as mught in the reders erys serue to the profe of suche heresyas as he went about to sow." 69 In efforts to suppress reformation teachings, a prohibition was passed in 1530 to forbid

the printing of "any book or books in English tongue, concerning holy scripture, not before this time printed within this his realm" 70 except with royal permission.

Tyndale published two editions of his New Testament and 3,000 copies of each edition, while at Worms. 71 One especially bound copy was delivered to the Queen of England, Anne Boleyn. This copy has survived and today is in the British Museum. 72 Although a forbidden book, Tyndale's New Testament was enormously popular. It was wanted at universities and also on the street. Common men, such as, apprentices, bricklayers, saddlers, tailors, weavers and servants, if they knew how to read, often pooled their money together to buy a copy of the Scriptures. The cost was relatively low, most likely about half a week's wages for a laborer. 73

The Bishop of London had thousands of copies of Tyndale's New Testaments gathered and burned. However, he could not stomp out this great work. Ironically, the same King Henry 8th, who ordered Tyndale's execution, later licensed an official English translation of the Bible. This became known as the Matthew's Bible, after Thomas Matthew, the assumed name of a Mr. John Rogers who revised Tyndale's translation of the New Testament and completed the unfinished portion of Tyndale's Old Testament translation. 74 By royal decree, it was required that every parish buy a copy of the Matthew's Bible and make it accessible to the public at all times. Because, in churches, it would be chained to a stand, it became known as The Chained Bible. 75 For those of the public who could not read, the parish

would provide someone who would read the pages of the Bible to them. The royal decree, instituting the access of the English Bible to all, came only three years after Tyndale's prayer; "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

We have seen how the story of these great English Bibles stretches far back in the history of England. However, the English Bible did not remain only in England. It was brought to the New World. It was brought to colonial America. In 1580, William Brewster was attending Peterhouse College in Cambridge, England. There, he adopted Puritan theology and began attending an independent, separatist church pastored by a John Smithe. The church came under persecution and Smithe, and others, fled to Amsterdam, Holland, in search of religious freedom. The group was further persecuted and many members were given prison sentences and lost their property. These persecuted believers became known as the Pilgrim Followers.

In Amsterdam, the Pilgrim Followers grew to about one hundred. They were hard-working but the pressure placed upon them caused them to relocate to Lyden. There, they grew to about three hundred. Persecution was further intensified when King James of England was offended by two of their books. This persecution and pressure to assimilate into the culture of Holland, again caused them to look at relocation, this time to the New World of colonial America.

How would they get to this New World? A group of London merchants proposed to give them a tract of land in this new colony and the rights to self-government. In 1620, they began their journey, originally in two vessels but finishing in

one, the Mayflower. Not all of them chose to make the move, but 102 brave Pilgrim Followers set out for a new life across the ocean. Many died, some without making it to America, others in the harsh conditions of the New World. Those who survived sank their roots down deep into this new virgin territory. We know these ones as Puritans. Their commitment and zeal for the Bible marks the beginnings of the Bible's stronghold in America. The Puritans would be followed by other immigrants with similar reverence and zeal for God's Word, the Holy Bible. They would see it become established as a foundation for life and would see its influence spread.

This great Book in two Testaments has come down to us from God. It has passed through martyrs' hands. While the Jews were held captive by the Babylonians, the Scriptures were sovereignly preserved. While the early Christians were enduring persecution from Rome, the Scriptures were sovereignly preserved. Jerome translated the Scriptures into Latin. Wycliffe, Tyndale and others translated them into English. Wycliffe had a dream to see common Englishmen know the Scriptures. Tyndale came later, but shared this same dream. He persevered in his work and now many plowboys in England, and the world, know and love the Scriptures.

Would not making the Scriptures accessible to the common man eventually lead to some of them twisting the Scriptures, either out of ignorance or deception? Yes, it would. But, had keeping the Scriptures as the sole property of the Catholic Church prevented their twisting and abuse? No, it hadn't. God's Word must be given to

God's children and God's Spirit will guide them in the understanding of it.

Why did Tyndale feel as passionately as he did about the Bible? It was because he knew it to be the authoritative Word of God. He said, in the language and spelling of his day; "For the scripture is the twichstone [touchstone] that tryeth all doctrynes, and by that we know the false from the true." 76 Tyndale knew that the Bible provided truth in a world of confusion and a solid foundation in a world of uncertainty.

In the garden of Eden, the serpent was successful in getting Eve to doubt God by saying to her; "... 'Indeed, has God said, ...' " (Genesis 3.1). The devil says the same thing to people today, trying to get them to doubt that God has spoken in the Bible. The Bible is God's pure truth. King David said of God's Word; "The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting. " (Psalm 119.160). He also said; " 'Now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are truth, ...' " (2 Samuel 7.28). If the Bible is the Word of God, then it is God Who we are obeying when we follow its teaching. The Bible is a powerful book. It is a fire and a hammer; "Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock? " (Jeremiah 23.29). It is like a sword; "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6.17). It is a probing instrument; "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4.12). It has a message of

salvation; "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1.16). 77

In the past, God spoke through Old Testament prophets. This was followed by Him speaking to us through His own Son. We will never fully plumb all of the Bible's depths. God's Word has power because it is an outshining of His light; "Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks, ..." (Isaiah 1.2). Like a great lighthouse shining in the darkness, and dispelling the darkness, God causes the Bible to continue to spread and further its own great work of bringing enlightenment and salvation to needy souls. Its progress cannot be stopped. It would be easier to stop the sun from rising. The Bible is like the sun which rises and brings light to those beneath it. It is like a mighty stream which cannot be stemmed; "...For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9). The Bible is a treasure greater than brilliant diamonds or costly pearls and when men and women come to see and understand its truth, they can cling to it and base their lives and futures on the hope and salvation that it proclaims. It is a map for following while walking through this world. It is a balance for weighing our actions. It is a chart by which we can sail into eternity with God. It is the words of heaven translated and put into the languages of men and women. By opening its pages and reading with an open and searching heart, we open a heavenly window for God's light to enter our souls. Jesus' words to His Heavenly Father ring true and stand throughout time; "for the words which You gave Me I

have given to them; ..." (John 17.8). the pages of the holy Bible.
 God's precious words were not only given
 to Jesus' twelve disciples, they are given Shawn Stevens
 to everyone who now receives them from

ENDNOTES

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