

# THE BATTLE FOR THE ENGLISH BIBLE

In the Middle Ages, Bible translations in the everyday language of ordinary people (the vernacular) were rare indeed. As languages changed, earlier vernacular translations gradually became incomprehensible to the majority.

In Western Europe the standard Bible was the Latin Vulgate, itself originally a translation into the vernacular. But with the passage of time only the clergy and the few educated understood Latin. Full or partial translations into the vernacular were uncommon. Furthermore, there was little urgency among the ecclesiastical class to teach people the importance of the Word of God or to give them access to it in their own tongue.

So, for many centuries the spirit of antichrist seemed to triumph in its age-old quest to take men from the Word, and, even better, to take the Word from men. The weapon it feared most, the sword of the Spirit, lay sheathed and inaccessible. The common folk of Western Europe had no vernacular Bible. Little wonder this period is called, even by secular historians, the Dark Ages. As it is written, *“The entrance of thy word bringeth light.”* (Ps 119.130)

But, that light still shone in the darkness. Though deep, the darkness could not totally extinguish it.

In the 12th & 13th C, there arose a growing quest for a vernacular Bible, particularly from those who questioned the errors of the Roman Church.

The first Bible to appear was the Waldensian. This movement was characterised from the beginning by strict adherence to the Word. Between 1175 and 1185 Peter Waldo initiated a translation of the New Testament into the Romance vernacular, the language of the mountainous region where the Swiss, French and Italian borders meet. Hand-written copies were diligently reproduced.

But the spirit of antichrist was not happy. It hates the Word. Rome soon condemned it and persecuted those who loved it. She did everything to keep the Bible from the common people, pronouncing translations into the vernacular illegal even though most could not read the Catholic Bible as it was in the little-known Latin.

- In 1199, Innocent III stated: *“to be reprov'd are those who translate into French the Gospels, the letters of Paul, the Psalter, etc.”*
- In 1215, he further declared: *“they shall be seized for trial and penalties, who engage in the translation of the sacred volumes...”; “as the beast touching the holy mount was to be stoned to death, so simple and uneducated men were not to touch the Bible...”*
- The Council of Toulouse, 1229, ruled: *“We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; unless anyone from motive of devotion should wish to have the Psalter ... but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.”*
- The Council of Tarragona, 1234, ruled that: *“No one may possess the books of*

*the Old and New Testament in the Romance language, and if anyone possesses them he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days after promulgation of this decree, so that they may be burned lest, be he a cleric or a layman, he be suspected until he is cleared of all suspicion”*

The Roman Church persecuted Waldo and refused to accept his translation. Wherever they could gain the ascendancy, the papal armies destroyed not only the Waldensians themselves but also their vernacular Scriptures.

Then, about 200 years later, one of the most significant events in Christian history took place, the production of the first full Bible in Middle English, the language of the common people of the time. Over the coming centuries England, often in the teeth of great opposition, would become perhaps the most important centre on earth for the production and distribution of the light of the Word over all the world.

This article is the story of that battle. It centres mainly on the lives of two men, John Wycliffe and William Tyndale.

For a dramatic depiction of their lives, I would recommend the following two full-length documentary videos:

- Wycliffe, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTYzSzERyJo>
- Tyndale, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-h2espvbB0>

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## JOHN WYCLIFFE (c 1324 - 1384) The first complete English Bible

### Wycliffe & the Bible

John Wycliffe was born in Yorkshire about 1324, around 160 years before Martin Luther.

Like Luther, Wycliffe was driven by the idea that Scripture alone should guide in matters of faith and practice.

His strong opposition to official Church positions on conduct and doctrine that conflicted with Scripture led to Wycliffe being called the Morningstar of the Reformation. It also led to his being brought to trial in 1377 before the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London, but his supporters came to his rescue and the effort failed.

The sharper the strife, the more Wycliffe turned to Holy Scripture as the only foundation of all Christian doctrine. For him, Scripture contained all truth and was the only authority.

Arising out of his conviction that every man was responsible to *obey* the Word of God, he concluded that every man must *know* that Word. So, the Bible must be accessible to him his own tongue. This led logically to the work Wycliffe is best known for, to make available the first full translation of the Bible into the vernacular English of his day.

From the 7th C, several translations of parts of the Bible had been made from Latin into the contemporary language of the ordinary people of England. But John Wycliffe was the first to dedicate himself:

- to translate the **whole** Bible into the native tongue of his day; and
- **to distribute and teach it** across the land via a network of lay preachers.

His translation was from an earlier translation, Jerome's Latin Vulgate Bible of 382 AD. Wycliffe had no access to the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts available to the Reformers 130 or so years later.

Though not himself responsible for the entire translation, there is no doubt it was his initiative and that its success was due to his leadership. Wycliffe himself is thought to have completed the New Testament, whilst his friend, Nicholas of Hereford, worked on the Old. Before Nicholas could finish, however, he went to Rome to appeal against the condemnation of Wycliffe by the English Catholic clergy. Whilst there he himself was tried and imprisoned. Though he escaped, he did not return to England during Wycliffe's lifetime. So, Wycliffe himself completed the work in 1382, just before his homecall two years later.

It was a work of supreme importance:

- Until the Reformation, it was the only complete Bible in English.
- Before the printing press, no other book had such widespread distribution.
- Though Wycliffe employed a large number of scribes, as every copy had to be hand-written they were unable to supply the growing demand.

- It is said some freeman farmers were so anxious to obtain the Word of God they often bartered a load of hay for just a few pages.

This was no mere academic exercise. Wycliffe organised a company of “poor preachers” (later known as “Lollards”). They were to be without money or property, freely and constantly mingling among the poor. Trained to teach from his Bible and armed only with portions of their master’s Bible, they preached all over England in the language of the people. From Scripture they denounced the sacraments of the Church for salvation, minimised clerical authority, and emphasised poverty, purity, and a Christian devotional life.

Because his Bible was “unauthorised” and viewed as full of errors, and because of his open opposition to many accepted Church practices and dogmas, Wycliffe came under sharp attack by the Church authorities. Although he enjoyed the protection and favour of the political rulers of the day, in 1382, two years before his death, Wycliffe was charged with heresy. The archbishop of Canterbury, Courtnay, gathered an assembly of notables to condemn his teachings.

Very interestingly, just as the synod was about to declare which of Wycliffe’s teachings were heretical, their meeting place shook. London was in a panic. An earthquake had struck! Its epicentre was nearby. A sitting of Parliament was interrupted, steeples toppled, buildings fell down, and large waves rolled up the Thames, overturning ships. The bell tower of Canterbury Cathedral tumbled down.

The terrified clergymen fled the building. Their consciences told them the earthquake was a warning from God. They wished to break up the synod. But Archbishop Courtnay ordered them back to their seats. He assured them the earthquake was a natural phenomenon, the result of noxious vapours that would lose their force once they burst out of the earth. (This was the prevailing view.) Wycliffe’s teachings were similar vapours, he said. Expel them from the Church, purify her from erroneous doctrine, and its convulsions also would end. The council accepted this explanation and condemned 10 of Wycliffe’s teachings as heresy and said 14 others were at least doubtful.

But Wycliffe’s followers and the common people insisted the earthquake came from God as a judgment on the synod. “They may have condemned Wycliffe,” they said, “but God has condemned them!” The council became known as the “Earthquake Synod.”

Following the decision to condemn his teachings as heretical and erroneous, Wycliffe was expelled from the University of Oxford, his most active helpers were summoned to recant, and his “poor preachers” were hindered in their work.

Withdrawing to his parish of Lutterworth in Leicestershire, he continued to preach boldly during the last 18 months of his life.

A little later Wycliffe was summoned to Rome to answer charges against him before the pope. But Wycliffe’s health was fast failing and he died in 1384. Nonetheless, the hatred of the Roman Church followed him to the grave. In 1416 the Council of Constance pronounced Wycliffe a heretic and decreed that his books be burned and his bones exhumed and burned and the ashes cast into the river Swift, at Lutterworth.

## **The Wycliffe Bible after Wycliffe**

One of Wycliffe's most devoted disciples was John Purvey (c 1354 – c 1421). Probably with Wycliffe's concurrence if not at his suggestion, after his death Purvey revised the original 1382 translation in 1388.

His aim was to make it more readable. The original was an extremely literal word for word rendering of the Latin Vulgate, at the expense of natural English word order. The revision replaced Latin-style construction with native English idiom.

Wycliffe's teachings spread rapidly in the decade following his death, seriously threatening the current ecclesiastical system. It spread so rapidly, and grew so popular, that even a hostile chronicler could say that almost every second man was a follower. With long russet dress down to the heels and staff in hand, the poor preachers preached in the mother tongue in churches, graveyards, squares, streets, and houses, wherever there were people. They then talked privately with those who had been impressed.

But the spirit of antichrist was not pleased. The battle for the English Bible was certainly not over. Within 20 years the transcribing of the Wycliffe Bible was checked by persecution and its production officially banned. The hierarchy zealously sought to destroy Wycliffe Bibles due to alleged mistranslations and erroneous commentary. Nevertheless, it was still widely diffused in 15th C England, so much so that Wycliffites were often designated by their opponents as "Bible men." Blessed insult!

## **The Lollards**

Many of Wycliffe's "poor preachers" became identified with the Lollards, part of a widespread evangelical movement in England in the late 14th and early 15th C. It is hard to say who was influencing whom. The Lollards followed the teachings of Wycliffe.

Who were the Lollards?

- There were Lollards in the Netherlands as early as the beginning of the 14th C.
- The earliest use of the name in England is in 1387, soon after Wycliffe's death. It was probably applied to the followers of Wycliffe, as they resembled those earlier groups that rejected the pope's authority and separated from the Roman system.
- They copied and distributed Wycliffe's Bible. The Bible was their authority.
- The Lollards preached personal faith in Christ, divine election and Biblical authority. They were highly critical of the power and wealth of the Roman Church and taught that the eucharist, transubstantiation, indulgences and a hierarchical organisation are unscriptural and false.
- They enjoyed the support of many Oxford scholars, powerful nobles, country gentlemen, merchants, burgesses and common people.

In 1395, the Lollards grew so strong they petitioned parliament to reform the church on Lollardist grounds. The king, Richard II, had earlier seemed anxious to repress the action of the clergy against the Lollards, but his attitude had been changing. The petition was a turning point. He was greatly angered and spoke strongly against it. Lollardy never again had the same power in England.

## Persecution for the Word

Initially hindered in their actions against the Lollards, the authorities did little more than order them not to preach in churches or churchyards. The bishops could do little more than threaten, but their proclamations and denunciations had little effect. A more savage policy was needed.

Then came their hour and the power of darkness.

In 1399, Henry IV overthrew Richard II.

One of the most active supporters of the new monarch was Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, a most determined opponent of Lollardy.

Church and state united to crush the Lollards. The Inquisition had reached England.

Once firmly established upon the throne, in 1400/01, despite strong support for the Lollards in the Commons, Parliament passed the infamous Act, "On the Burning of the Heretic". Arundel was probably the instigator.

This Act was explicitly aimed at the new "sect" (i.e. the Wycliffites). It empowered the bishops to arrest, imprison and examine offenders and to hand over to the civil authorities any who relapsed or refused to abjure. The condemned were to be burnt "in an high place" before the people.

Then, in 1408, Arundel took further steps. He issued *The Constitutions of Oxford* to suppress the teaching of the new sect. Wycliffite and Lollard books and Bibles were to be searched for and destroyed. Translation of the Scriptures was to be strictly regulated:

*"we decree and ordain that no man shall by his own authority, **translate** any text of the scripture into English, or any other tongue, ...upon pain of greater excommunication, until the said translation be allowed by the ordinary of the place, or, if the case so require, by the council provincial."*

The *Constitutions* further decreed that no man was to **read**, without episcopal licence, any translation of the Bible "*made in the time of the late Master John Wycliffe, or since*".

The antichrist spirit animating Arundel is plainly manifest in his estimation of the man who gave the English-speaking people their first complete Bible:

*"This pestilential and most wretched John Wycliffe of damnable memory, a child of the old devil, and himself a child or pupil of Anti-Christ, who while he lived, walking in the vanity of his mind ... crowned his wickedness by translating the Scriptures into the mother tongue." (Fountain, John Wycliffe, p 45)*

Martyrdom swiftly followed those holding fast to the Word.

## Early martyrs for the English Bible

As well as against the Bible itself, an evil eye was also directed at any for whom the Word was the absolute, those who taught, translated and distributed the Word.

The burning of William Sawtree, a priest and the first martyr, immediately followed the passing of the 1401 Act. Accused of holding heretical opinions, including that every priest and deacon is more bound to preach the Word of God than to say particular services at the prescribed hours, he was burned alive at the stake in Smithfield on 2 March 1401.

Wycliffe's partner in translation, John Purvey, was also seized. After Wycliffe died, Purvey had moved to Bristol, well known at the time for its sympathies with Wycliffe and his followers. There, in 1388, he finished his revision of the 1384 Bible. He also travelled the land as one of Wycliffe's "poor preachers". His preaching brought him under increasing scrutiny and by 1390 he was imprisoned.

After the passing of the infamous Act, in 1401 Purvey was brought to trial. There, unable to face death by burning, he recanted his "heresies". Inducted to the vicarage of West Hythe in Kent, like others who had recanted he was ill at ease. In 1403 he resigned and for the next 18 years preached wherever he could. Eventually, in 1421, he was imprisoned once more, where it is assumed he died.

Meanwhile Arundel determined to break support for Lollardism by purging the nobility of sympathisers.

One who had been won to pious living by the poor preachers, and openly professed Christ and the common Lollard doctrines was Sir John Oldcastle (1378-1417).

Perhaps Oldcastle presumed on his former friendship with the new king, Henry V. But, like his father, the new king too persecuted the Lollards. His churchmen told him Wycliffe's doctrines were pestilential heresy. Although Henry was for reform, it was not of the type Oldcastle envisioned.

Despite opposition, Oldcastle threw open his home to Lollard preachers, making it a base for their operations. He had copies of Wycliffe's works translated and distributed to the Continent.

Commanded to appear before Archbishop Arundel, Oldcastle ignored the summons. On September 23 1413, he was arrested and brought before the Archbishop. Here he presented his confession of faith. When Oldcastle denounced the pope as antichrist, his fate was sealed. He warned the bystanders they were in danger of hell if they continued in the teaching of his Catholic judges.

Arundel condemned him to death as a heretic. Because of his friendship with the king and social standing, Oldcastle was given forty days to recant. During that time, he escaped and hid in Wales for four years. Then someone betrayed him. Oldcastle was captured, hanged briefly and then burnt for an obstinate heretic. (Obstinate heretics felt the full wrath of the burning, not being strangled beforehand.) He was suspended in iron chains over a fire and roasted to death like an animal, suffering a horrible death for his faith in Christ and His Word.

One man much influenced by Wycliffe was John Huss, the Bohemian reformer. When news reached England of his burning in 1415 by the Council of Constance, the English clergy were incited to yet more vigorous action against Lollard preachers and books.

From this time, there was no more wayside preaching. Instead, Bible readings and exhortations were given in houses, peasants' huts, saw pits, and field ditches.

Not all of 15th C Protestants exhibited the courage of the martyrs, for the manner of their death was not pleasant. But enough spurned the easier path to keep alive the Bible-centred spirit of Wycliffe. Strengthened by persecution, many became even more zealous for the Word.

Lollard literature continued to be very widely circulated despite many edicts forbidding it. In fact, in 1428, Archbishop Chichele admitted the Lollards seemed as numerous as ever and their literary and preaching work as vigorous as before. Furthermore, many of the poorer rectors and parish priests, and a great many chaplains and curates, were in secret association with them.

So, the Wycliffe Bible had led to widespread proclamation of the Word of God, preparing the way for and hastening the day when the Reformation would come to England. Though it would have to wait another hundred years or so, the flame was kept alive by ardent believers who were faithful unto death.

### **The Wycliffe Bible on the eve of the Reformation**

The repressive measures against those seeking the Truth of the Scriptures had some success, at least among the clergy, for Lollardy became increasingly a lay movement. Yet over 100 years after it first appeared, on the very eve of the Reformation, despite grievous persecution, the influence and circulation of the Wycliffe Bible continued.

The first English Bible was a dangerous possession. It was outlawed in 15th & 16th C England. It was an offence to even possess portions of Holy Scripture in English. It was kept under the floorboards, read in the cellar or in the heart of the forest. To possess and to meet to read the Word in English in the 15th C was not only an act of defiance. It was an act of considerable courage. The consequences could be dire.

Laws were made that "*whoever read 'Wycliffe's learning' (as the Bible was called) should forfeit land, cattle, goods and life, and be condemned as heretics to God, enemies to the Crown, and traitors to the kingdom.*" To possess this Bible was to be branded (at times, quite literally) a "heretic" and sometimes burned at the stake if you did not repent by confirming allegiance to the papacy. Some were even burnt with copies of the Scriptures round their necks.

Episcopal records on the eve of the Reformation in England reveal that one of the things that stirred up the wrath of the authorities was any enthusiasm for reading the Bible. That reading and teaching the Word of God in English was considered a crime worthy of prison, torture and death is illustrated by the following:

- In 1506, in Amersham, 30 people were branded in the right cheek. Why?

Because they wished to hear and read the Holy Scriptures. Their necks were tied fast to a post and their hands held, and the hot iron was put to their cheeks. Thus they bore in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus.

- According to Foxe, one of those so branded was **Thomas Chase**. How was he detected? Because *“someone heard him twice recite the epistle of James and the first chapter of Luke”*. Foxe records that he was murdered in his cell.
- In 1511, **James Brewster** of Colchester was burnt at Smithfield, London. The charge? *“That he had a certain little book of Scripture in English.”*
- In 1514, **Richard Hun** was sent to the Lollards' Tower of St Paul's where, according to Foxe, he was almost certainly murdered. Why? Because an English Bible with a prologue sympathetic to Wycliffe's doctrines was found in his house.
- A certain **John Higgs** was summoned because he *“had in his keeping a book of the four Evangelists, and did often read them”*.

What terrible crimes! How the spirit of antichrist hates the Word!

Truly the people were hungering for the Word of God in English. Though the spirit of antichrist was deeply antagonistic to its translation into the vernacular, Wycliffe and his co-workers risked their freedom and their lives to provide it. And the people risked their goods, their freedom and their lives to possess and read it.

Though the battle was not yet over, the Word of God would very soon increase much more.

## WILLIAM TYNDALE (c 1494 – 1536) The first printed New Testament in English

By the early 16th C, a major revision of the first full English Bible was needed:

- **For greater clarity** since the language was changing from the Middle English of Wycliffe's day to Early Modern English.
- **For greater accuracy** since many Greek New Testament manuscripts not previously accessible had recently become available. This enabled a more reliable translation as the Wycliffe Bible was based on the Latin Vulgate Bible, itself a translation.

But there was a problem. A big problem. The 1408 *Constitutions of Oxford* were still in force. Unauthorised translation, reading and possession of the Bible were still crimes.

Was there a man willing to hazard a fresh translation of the English Bible?

Yes. William Tyndale. Before his early death, he had given the English people a New Testament and a substantial part of the Old. There were three distinct advantages:

- **Clarity** - Tyndale was a true scholar, so fluent in 8 languages that it was said one would think any one of them to be his native tongue. He is frequently referred to as the "Architect of the English Language", even more so than Shakespeare, as so many of the phrases he coined are still in our language today. Tyndale took the ill regarded, unpopular and awkward Middle English tongue and formed an Early Modern English that Shakespeare and others later followed and built on.
- **Accuracy** - His was the first English translation to draw directly from original texts. He used the best available Hebrew texts and Erasmus' 1516 Greek-Latin New Testament. (After the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, Greek texts became available in Europe for the first time in centuries. Erasmus compiled and edited these into what came to be called the *Textus Receptus*, which became the base for most Reformation-era Western and Central European New Testament translations.
- **Availability** - Tyndale was the first to produce Scripture in English using the recently invented printing press. This enabled faster production and wider circulation of his work.

### Early Years

Tyndale was born about 1494 in Gloucestershire.

He studied theology at Oxford, but the course did not include the systematic study of Scripture. Tyndale's early passion for the pure Word of God is well seen in his pungent retort:

*"They have ordained that no man shall look on the Scripture, until he be noselled in heathen learning eight or nine years and armed with false principles, with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of the Scripture."*

Upon graduation, Tyndale was for a time tutor to a Gloucestershire family. While there he translated Erasmus' *"The Christian Soldier's Handbook"*. This work insisted on the duty of studying the New Testament, making it the final court of appeal in all questions of life and doctrine.

Tyndale certainly took this teaching to heart. He disturbed the local clergy by routing them at the dinner table with chapter and verse of Scripture. Accused of heresy, nothing was ever proved. One day, he was infuriated by a visiting clergyman deeply entrenched in Roman Catholic dogma. When he taunted Tyndale, *"We are better to be without God's laws than the Pope's"*. Tyndale responded,

*"I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scriptures than you!"*

Such was the spirit that animated William Tyndale quite literally to his dying breath.

### **Tyndale Prints the New Testament in English**

In 1523, he travelled to London to seek authority and funds from the bishop of London, Tunstall, to translate the New Testament into the common English of the day. Tyndale needed his support as under the *Constitutions of Oxford*, it was strictly forbidden to translate the Bible into the native tongue without episcopal authority. This ban was vigorously enforced by contemporary statesmen like Cardinal Wolsey and the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, to prevent the rise of English 'Lutheranism'.

Tunstall declined his permission to produce this "heretical" text, and further enquiries convinced Tyndale his project would not be welcomed anywhere else in England.

So, in about May 1524, Tyndale went to Germany to fulfil his mission in a more hospitable environment. He never returned to England, but lived a hand-to-mouth existence, constantly dodging the Catholic authorities.

It is thought he translated the New Testament in Wittenberg, with the aid of Luther.

Printing began in Cologne in summer 1525, but Tyndale was betrayed to the authorities. The city senate forbade the printer to proceed with the work. Printing the Bible was a very hazardous thing! Tyndale just escaped in time with his precious manuscript, fleeing up the Rhine to Worms. There he started again and in February 1526 6000 copies appeared of the first complete printed New Testament in English. Another 20,000 followed in a subsequent edition in 1534.

These were quickly smuggled into England, where they were eagerly taken up and read. One of the later editions even came into the hands of Anne Boleyn, the young woman who became Henry VIII's second queen!

### **The Fiery Trial**

Translation of the Bible led to persecution by the Roman Church in all countries of the

Reformation. This was particularly fierce in England and Scotland. Furthermore, the threat of being put to death as a heretic did not extend merely to the translator of the Scriptures into English. It also hung over those distributing, possessing or reading such a translation or any part of it.

And it was no idle threat.

### ***The Burning of the Tyndale Translation of the Scriptures***

Though eagerly taken up by many, Tyndale's New Testament received a less-than-enthusiastic response from the authorities. Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, and Sir Thomas More were furious. Although thousands were printed, so fierce was the systematic destruction by the Romanist clerics that only three copies of the first edition of Tyndale's New Testament have survived. (Similarly, only nine copies remain of his later translation of the Pentateuch.)

In October, Tunstall had all the copies he could trace gathered and burned publicly at St Paul's Cross. Yet still they circulated. So, Tunstall arranged to buy them before they left the Continent, to be burned in bulk. But Tyndale turned this to his advantage, using the money to clear his debts and to finance revision and further production.

### ***The Burning of the Translator of the Scriptures Anticipated***

Tyndale anticipated the Catholic authorities would not be content with merely burning copies of his translation of the New Testament:

*'In burning the New Testament, they did none other thing than I looked for; **no more shall they do if they burn me also**, if it be God's will it shall so be. Nevertheless in translating the New Testament I did my duty and so do I now...'*

Later events would not prove him wrong.

### ***Burned for Distributing the Scriptures***

While the secular and religious authorities hatched plans to silence Tyndale himself, many others were hunted down for distributing or simply for possessing or reading the Scriptures in their own language.

- **Thomas Garrett**, a curate at All Hallows, hid some of the Tyndale New Testaments smuggled into England. They were distributed to laymen, priests and students in Oxford, a very dangerous place. Found out and arrested by Cardinal Wolsey's agents, he and around 24 students were put in prison for no more than distributing and reading the New Testament. After 6 months they were released, but four died (the first of many martyrs under Henry). Some were martyred later. Twelve years after, Garret himself, warned about his preaching and told by the king to recant, was put in the Tower and burned at the stake in Smithfield in 1540.

Garret was not the only one to die for distributing English New Testaments.

- **Richard Bayfield** was a leading trader in the New Testaments and other books of Tyndale. Having abjured in front of Tunstall in 1528, he fled to the Low

Countries where he helped Tyndale. Bayfield ran at least three large cargoes of Tyndale's books into England. On his first trip, at midsummer 1530, he landed illicitly on the east coast and brought the books to London. In November he shipped another consignment to St Katherine's docks, less than 1000 yards downriver from the Tower of London. Sir Thomas More had wind of this and most of the cargo was seized. At Easter 1531, Bayfield landed in Norfolk and brought his books to London along graziers' roads. Betrayed, he was seized, tortured and held in the Tower, shackled to the wall of his cell by his neck, waist and legs, in darkness. He was burnt at the stake at Smithfield on 4 December 1531.

### ***Burned for Possessing the Scriptures***

Even the mere possession of the Word was a crime in the eyes of those inspired by the spirit of antichrist.

- **James Bainham** was burned at the stake on 1 May 1532 for possessing a Tyndale New Testament. Addressing the crowd just before the lighting of the fire, he exclaimed: *"I come hither, good people! accused and condemned for an heretic... And these be the articles that I die for, ... first, I say it is lawful for every man and woman, to have God's Book in the mother tongue...."*

Things in Scotland were no better. Even when the tide of persecution was easing somewhat for a period in England, in June 1535, the Scottish Parliament declared that all *possessing* New Testaments or 'heretical' books must 'deliver them up to their ordinary [priest] within 40 days, under the penalty of confiscation and imprisonment'. Then, in 1536 the *reading* of the Scriptures in English was prohibited.

- **Dean Thomas Forret**, vicar of Dollar, was burned at the stake in Edinburgh in March 1539. After his conversion, he studied Tyndale's New Testament from 6am until noon, memorising three chapters a day. At his trial, he defended himself by quoting from 1 Corinthians 14 to show the need to translate the Scriptures. When asked how he knew the verse, he showed them in the New Testament he carried with him. It was snatched from him and waved triumphantly as evidence before the court. *"Behold, sirs, he has the heresy book...know thou heretic that it is contrary to our acts and express commands to have a New Testament or Bible in English, which is enough to burn thee for"*. He was sentenced for having and using the New Testament in English. George Crichton, Bishop of Dunkeld, was one that ensured the execution of Forret. He was heard to say, *"I thank God, that I never knew what the Old and New Testament was!"* O, spirit of antichrist!

Truly these are numbered among those of whom it is written that the world is not worthy. They were *"slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held."* (Rev. 6:9)

### **Translation of the Old Testament Begun**

Tyndale now began the Old Testament, apparently in Antwerp. When he left England, his knowledge of Hebrew had been rudimentary, yet he mastered it so as to produce an admirable translation.

The enemy was no more pleased about this than about his translation of the New Testament. Foxe tells how, in 1529, sailing to Hamburg to print his translation of Deuteronomy, Tyndale was shipwrecked and lost his precious manuscript, the fruit of many hours labours. He had to start all over again.

The Pentateuch was finally completed between Easter and December. Printed in Antwerp in early January 1530, copies were in England by the summer.

Jonah followed in 1531. Joshua to 2 Chronicles were also completed, but not published until after his death as part of the Thomas Matthew Bible.

### **Pursuit, Betrayal & Death**

As Tyndale's translation was banned by the authorities, it was necessary for him to do his work in great secrecy. All his writings were done in places of concealment so secure that neither the ecclesiastical nor diplomatic emissaries of Wolsey and Henry VIII, charged to track, hunt down, and seize the fugitive, were able to locate them.

Fearing Tyndale's influence, Henry sent an ambassador to persuade him to return to England. In a secret, night-time meeting outside Antwerp city walls, Tyndale agreed to return provided the king would print an English Bible. But by the time Henry agreed to do this, Tyndale was already dead.

In 1534, Tyndale settled at Antwerp, thinking the progress of the Reformation in England made it safe to relax his guard. Henry had just declared himself head of the Church of England. Sir Thomas More, the powerful supporter of papal supremacy had been deposed and replaced by Thomas Cromwell, sympathetic to the reform movement.

Antwerp was a free city, so his enemies could take no legal action against Tyndale there. But it was surrounded by territory controlled by the staunchly Catholic Holy Roman Emperor. In 1535, Tyndale was betrayed by Henry Philips, probably an agent of either Henry, the Church of England or possibly both. He was kidnapped and taken to the castle of Vilvorde, near Brussels, controlled by the Catholic authorities. There he was imprisoned for over 500 days in horrible conditions.

Even Thomas Cromwell, the most powerful man in England next to Henry VIII, tried to get Tyndale released, but Phillips in Belgium, acting for the ecclesiastical authorities, blocked all moves.

A prison letter from Tyndale has survived. In it he asks for warmer clothes, a lamp, a blanket, **but above all** his Hebrew Bible, grammar and lexicon so he could study. Evidently his heart was still on finishing his translation of the Old Testament. Even in his horrible prison conditions, the Word of God was still foremost in his life.

During his imprisonment, the jailer, his daughter and others of his household were so impressed with his preaching and sincerity that they were converted. Such was his conduct that his jailer is reported to have said that if Tyndale were not a true Christian, then no one was.

He was tried for heresy and treason and convicted. On the morning of 6 October 1536,

Tyndale was tied to a stake, strangled and burnt in the prison yard.

A brief letter from an English agent to Lord Cromwell two months later said, *"They speak much of the patient sufferance of Master Tyndale at the time of his execution."*

According to Foxe, his last words reveal that the Word of God was still his foremost thought right up to the very end. He cried with a loud voice, *"Lord, open the king of England's eyes."* Why? To give his people the Word of God in their own native tongue.

### **Tyndale's Legacy**

Tyndale's dying prayer was answered remarkably quickly. Even before his death a full English Bible had been circulating for some months in his native land based largely upon his own work. Furthermore, within three years, Henry VIII had licensed what was called the "Great Bible" to be placed in every church in the land.

Even more remarkably, the Great Bible (and subsequent translations) was substantially based on Tyndale's own work. Hence, his "Tyndale Bible", as it was known, continued to play a key role in spreading the Word throughout the English-speaking world.

(Indeed, some 75 years later, the creators of the 1611 King James Version also drew significantly on the Tyndale Bible, as well as from later translations descended from Tyndale. One estimate suggests the KJV New Testament is 83% Tyndale's, and the Old Testament 76% of the books he translated. Others say that the overall proportion is more like 90%.)

Tyndale's labour was most certainly not in vain.

But how is it possible that Henry came to licence a Bible so substantially based on a translation that the ecclesiastical authorities had only recently been consigning to the flames, whose translator had been consigned to the flames, and some of whose distributors, possessors and readers had likewise been consigned to the flames?

The answer is another chapter in the fascinating battle for an English Bible.

Truly, William Tyndale had kept the faith and finished his course. Though he did not see it, his labours had led to the full Word of God being given to his people. The price he paid was heavy, exile from his homeland, ever in hiding and on the run, prison and death. But the reward...

Final victory in the battle for an English Bible at last seemed within grasp. But the spirit of antichrist would not give in easily. The Word of God was far too dangerous a weapon to be given free course among the people without fierce resistance.

A major battle had indeed been won. But the war was not yet over. A counterattack would soon come. The battle would rage back and forward for another 20 or so more years before the Word would become the undisputed possession of the English-speaking peoples.

## **A COMPLETE ENGLISH BIBLE WITH ROYAL APPROVAL**

### **The 1535 Tyndale/Coverdale Bible**

Whilst in exile doing his translation work, Tyndale had some worthy helpers. Two of the most significant were John Rogers (c 1500 – 1555) and Miles Coverdale (1486 -1568).

Ordained a priest in 1514, Coverdale was among the very first to respond to Reformation teaching by Lutheran-minded people at Cambridge in the 1520s.

He turned to the Scriptures. Coverdale's guiding principle became the Word of God. He believed it was this that would effect reformation of the church. *"Wherever the Scripture is known it reformeth all things. And Why? Because it is given by the inspiration of God."*

Becoming a zealous reformer, he was one of the first to publicly preach the Protestant gospel. In 1528, he openly denounced the mass, image worship and private confession.

But Coverdale's words and success in winning converts did not go unnoticed. Although Henry VIII had rejected papal overlordship, the new Church of England was still essentially Catholic. Prelates seeking to send him to the fire were soon pursuing Coverdale.

He went to Holland where he met Tyndale. A strong union with a common objective was formed. He assisted in the translation work in Hamburg 1529 and Antwerp 1529–35.

After Tyndale's imprisonment, urged and partly financed by the brother-in-law of John Rogers' wife, Coverdale sought to finish the translation of the English Bible in Antwerp.

Using Tyndale's published New Testament, Pentateuch and Jonah (but apparently not his unpublished Joshua to 2 Chronicles manuscript), Coverdale completed the remaining books of the Old Testament. Not being a Hebrew or Greek scholar, he mainly used German Bibles and Latin sources. Then in 1535, while Tyndale was still in prison, after diligent labours, the first complete printed English Bible was published. It was quickly imported into England.

Although Tyndale was not explicitly mentioned in the preface to the Coverdale Bible, many clerics were lukewarm or positively hostile. Yet amazingly, Henry, an energetic opponent of Lutheranism, was favourably influenced towards it. How? Perhaps by Thomas Cromwell who sympathised with the reform movement. Or perhaps by the Queen, Anne Boleyn, who showed a keen interest in the Coverdale Bible. After asking if it contained any heresies, Henry gave verbal approval for it to go abroad among the people, though at that stage no formal royal approval could be included on the title page.

### **The 1537 Thomas Matthew Bible**

The first English Bible distributed under royal licence was the 1537 Matthew's Bible.

But what is this Bible? Where did it come from? How was it produced so quickly? And who was the translator?

It was the combined translation work of two men loathed by those ecclesiastics who favoured the old Catholic ways, Tyndale and Coverdale!

The editor was another close associate of Tyndale in his translation work in exile, John Rogers. (They had met in Antwerp in 1534, and under Tyndale's influence he had abandoned Catholicism.)

Rogers' role was not to translate but to prepare the preface and the 2000 or so marginal notes taken from the works of the continental reformers. For the translation itself, Rogers' used both Tyndale's published work and also the precious manuscript of his unpublished rendering of Joshua to Chronicles entrusted to his custody after Tyndale's arrest. For the rest he used Coverdale's Old Testament work along with Sebastian Münster's 1534/35 Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible.

Who, then, was Thomas Matthew, named as the translator in the title of the Matthew's Bible?

- Some say it is a pseudonym for John Rogers.
- It is more probable, however, that it is a pseudonym for Tyndale himself. Tyndale had only just been executed as a heretic, so his name could not be used. Rogers could not honestly claim the work as his own. But Thomas Matthew was a name Tyndale had actually used in the past when seeking to conceal his identity.
- A further indication to the discerning that the Matthew's Bible was really mainly Tyndale's work is that between the Old and New Testaments are the ornamental letters, "WT".

The Matthew's Bible was printed in Paris and Antwerp in 1537 by the same relative of Rogers' wife who earlier urged Coverdale to produce the first complete English Bible.

Like the Coverdale Bible, this too was complained against. But things were changing. The Reformation was gaining ground in high places. When Archbishop Cranmer saw the new Bible, he was so excited he asked Chancellor Thomas Cromwell to use his influence with the king to obtain the royal licence for it. Remarkably, Henry granted it the "King's most gracious licence" and ordered it be released to the people. Even more remarkably, the royal licence was also procured for the 1537 second edition of the Coverdale Bible!

Thus, within a year of Tyndale's execution, the Coverdale Bible (containing all Tyndale's published Bible works) and the Bible of Thomas Matthew (pseudonym for Tyndale) became the first officially authorised Bibles in the English language.

How ironical! The Tyndale translation was burned in 1526 and the translator in 1536. Yet now that same translation, in two different guises, is granted the royal licence for free circulation among the people.

Truly, He who stirred up the spirit of the king of Persia to send Ezra to teach the Word in Israel was here at work among the powers that be in England to give free course to His Word.

Things were changing indeed. How great Thou art!

## **The 1539-40 Great Bible**

Despite the newly granted royal licence for the English Bible, many were unhappy with the outspoken Protestantism of the notes of the most suitable one for use in churches, the Matthew's Bible. So, it was decided (apparently by the powerful Lord Cromwell, Royal Secretary and vice-regent in church affairs) to revise it.

Miles Coverdale was entrusted with the task. So, the new Bible would be Coverdale's revision of John Rogers' revision of the Bible of Tyndale!

Coverdale made use of Münster's Latin Old Testament, later editions of Erasmus' Greek New Testament and the Complutensian Polyglot (listing Hebrew, Greek and Latin in parallel columns). The controversial notes of Matthew's Bible were dropped, retaining only such as made the meaning of certain words and expressions clearer.

Printing began in Paris around May 1538. But a group of English bishops interfered. The pope issued an edict that the presses be stopped and the English Bible burned. The French inquisitor-general halted the almost completed work at the end of the year. Sheets already printed were burned.

But all was not lost. After diplomatic representations, the metal type and skilled workmen were brought to London to begin again. Called the Great Bible, it was completed in April 1539. It was the first English Bible printed in England.

Cromwell ordered the English clergy to allow a large, legible edition of the Great Bible in every church in the land in a convenient place where people could *'most commodiously resort to the same and read it'*. The edition of 1540 carried the royal authorisation.

Ironically, the title page of the 1540 & 1541 editions refer to their being *"overseen and perused at the commandment of the King's Highness by the right reverend fathers in God, Cuthbert Bishop of Durham and Nicholas Bishop of Rochester."* The Bishop of Durham was none less than Cuthbert Tunstall, formerly Bishop of London, the same who had refused Tyndale support to translate the Bible in 1523 and who had bought up as many copies of his New Testament as possible to burn them at St Paul's Cross in 1526! And now, less than two decades later, the same man is lending his authority to a Bible translation that is essentially Tyndale's. O divine irony.

The battle was certainly going the right way.

But the spirit of antichrist would not give up easily. The sword of the Word was too dangerous a weapon to permit the people to have unfettered access to it without a fight.

All was certainly not plain sailing. The pendulum oscillated sharply over the next 20 years or so.

## **The later years of Henry's reign (1540-1546) The pendulum swings back**

The first swing back took place in the later years of Henry's reign.

This coincided with the execution of Thomas Cromwell and the distinct hardening of attitudes against the Reformation and its doctrine of sola scriptura (Scripture only) as epitomised in the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563). (For a fuller account of the blasphemous, antichristian measures concerning the Bible taken by this Council and popes up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> C, see Appendix 1.)

Liberty to read an English Bible was briefly revoked:

- In 1543, Parliament banned the Tyndale translation and made it a crime for any unlicensed person to read or expound the Bible to others, even forbidding private Bible reading by the lower classes.
- In 1546, Henry decreed that no one at all was to receive or possess a Tyndale or Coverdale New Testament. Large quantities of both were burnt at St Paul's Cross.

Illogically, however, the Great Bible was left in churches, though abortive attempts were made to revise it in conformity with the Latin Vulgate.

Pursuit by the prelates again moved Coverdale to seek safety on the Continent. Henry's favour towards Bible editors was not certain!

Then the pendulum swung the other way under the next king.

### **Edward VI (1547-53) The pendulum goes forward again**

After the death of Henry, Coverdale, like many other religious exiles, returned to England. The widowed Queen, Catherine Parr, was sympathetic to the Reformation, and Coverdale was her Almoner and preached at her funeral in 1548. He was also Chaplain to the Boy King, Edward VI.

Edward had succeeded to the throne at the early age of nine. But the young prince had been raised in an atmosphere of piety and Christian influence. His tutors were Bible-loving men and the reform-minded Cranmer was personally responsible for his studies.

Their effect influence is evident from an incident at Edward's coronation. Three swords were brought to be carried before him, as the king of three kingdoms. But he said there was one missing. When asked why, he replied, it was the Bible, adding:

*"That book is the Sword of the Spirit, and to be preferred before these ... Without that sword we are nothing, we can do nothing, we have no power. From that we are what we are this day. ... He that rules without it is not to be called God's minister, or a king. Under that we ought to live, to fight, to govern the people and to perform all our own affairs. From that alone we obtain all power, virtue, grace, salvation, and whatsoever we need of divine strength."*

He then commanded a Bible to be brought and carried before him.

An Act of Uniformity passed in 1549 enjoined the use of the Edward VI Prayer Book (which included Coverdale's Scriptures) in every parish of the land.

The early death of Edward VI, however, saw the pendulum swing very sharply back. The strongly Catholic Mary Tudor greatly boosted the papists.

### **Queen Mary Tudor (1553-1558) The pendulum swings sharply back**

In the murderous Mary, the spirit of antichrist found a willing vessel to vent its hatred against those most involved in the production and dissemination of the English Bible.

The chief translator had already been burnt. Now vengeance was to be wreaked against the two others who both helped Tyndale when alive, and completed and disseminated his translation when imprisoned and dead, Miles Coverdale and John Rogers.

#### ***Miles Coverdale Exiled***

After Mary's accession, like many others, Coverdale was imprisoned. It seemed he would be put to death at the stake. That was certainly the intention. In anticipation of death, Coverdale wrote,

*Pray for us, for, God willing, we shall not leave you, we will go before you. You shall see in us that we preached no lies, nor tales of tubs, but even the true word of God, for which we, by God's grace, and help of your prayers, will willingly and joyfully give our blood to be shed for confirmation of the same... Like God's children let us go forward apace; the wind is on our back. Hoist up the sails, lift up your hearts and hands unto God in prayer; and keep your anchor of faith to cast in time on the rock of God's word, and on his mercy in Christ.*

The Danish King interceded with Mary on his behalf. (Coverdale's wife's brother-in-law was one of the translators of the Danish Bible.) Very grudgingly Mary eventually released Coverdale. He joined the growing company of exiled English ministers.

From autumn 1558 to August 1559, Coverdale was in Geneva. He was soon caught up once more in his chief life's work, English Bible translation. This time it was the Geneva Bible, the first English version to have verse numbers. This, together with its explanatory notes, aided earnest Bible study. It became the Bible of the Puritans.

So, the murderous designs of the spirit of antichrist were foiled in the case of Coverdale, associate of Tyndale in his work on the English Bible, publisher of the first complete printed English Bible and editor of the Great Bible placed in every church in England.

But not so in the case of John Rogers, Tyndale's other key co-worker and editor of the Matthew's Bible, the first English Bible to receive a royal licence.

#### ***John Rogers Burned***

Rogers had remained on the Continent from the time he met Tyndale, pastoring a Lutheran church in north Germany for part of the time. In 1548, he returned to England. He was made a prebendary at St. Paul's, but declined to wear the prescribed vestments.

On the accession of Mary in July 1553, Rogers waxed bold for the truth of Scripture. He

exhorted his listeners to remain true to Reformation teachings, commending the *"true doctrine taught in King Edward's days,"* and warning against *"pestilent popery, idolatry and superstition."*

Soon after, he was summoned before the Queen's council. Then, in January 1554, Bonner, the new Bishop of London, imprisoned him with others for a year. After Parliament re-enacted the penal statutes against Lollards, Rogers again came before the council and was sentenced to death for denying the Christian character of the Church of Rome and the real presence in the sacrament.

Though even denied a meeting with his wife, he awaited and met death cheerfully. On 4 February 1555, Rogers was burned at the stake at Smithfield, the first English Protestant martyr under Mary.

The French ambassador was present. He spoke of the support given to Rogers by the greatest part of the people: *"even his children assisted at it, comforting him in such a manner that it seemed as if he had been led to a wedding."*

(For a fuller account of the execution, from Foxe's Book of Martyrs, see Appendix 2.)

### **Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) The English Bible is finally secure**

Finally, the infamous "Bloody Mary" went to her own place and a new queen was enthroned, Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The pendulum swung back again.

In the first year of the new reign, Elizabeth repromulgated Henry's injunction of 1538 to place a Bible in English in every church of the land. Though there was much burning of Bibles in Mary's reign, she had not revoked the 1538 injunction to place Bibles in every church in the land. But her reign had not been favourable to its full observance, in letter or in spirit.

Though the battle would continue to reform the Church of England and to establish a purer Christianity based on the Word alone, from the time of Elizabeth, the free availability of the English Bible would never again be threatened.

The spirit of antichrist had been overcome. The Word had prevailed.

Furthermore, the heavy price paid by many for the right to translate, publish, distribute and possess the Bible in English would not be in vain. In days to come men fired with the same Spirit that inspired the Scriptures would be burdened to send from these shores countless millions of copies of the Word of God to nations and peoples in every part of the globe in their own language.

What an unspeakable privilege!

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Access to the Bible fettered by the Council of Trent & later popes

Rome's claim of authority to determine who can and cannot translate, publish and read the Bible is one of the most blasphemous ever made.

In 1546, the Council of Trent **placed Bible translations on its list of prohibited books** and **forbade any to read them without a licence** from a bishop or inquisitor.

Trent did not forbid Scripture reading completely. Priests were allowed to read the Latin Bible and bishops and inquisitors could grant a licence for certain faithful Catholics to read it in Latin as long as accompanied by Catholic notes and if it was believed these would not be "harmed" by such reading. In practice, however, Trent forbade the reading of the Scriptures to at least 90% of the people.

The Catholic attitude to the Bible is evident from a speech of Du Mans at Trent,

***"the Scriptures had become useless, since the schoolmen had established the truth of all doctrines; and though formerly read in the church, for the instruction of the people, and still read, yet they ought not to be made a study, because the Lutherans only gained those who read them."***

Thereafter, popes up to the end of the 19th C regularly reaffirmed the decisions and restrictions of Trent against owning the vernacular Scriptures. For example,

- **Pius IV** (1559 – 1565) compiled a list of forbidden and **officially prohibited books** in his 1559 *Index of Trent*. **It included the Bible**. Here is an excerpt:

*Rule III: ... translations of books of the Old Testament may be allowed by the judgment of bishops for the use of learned and pious men **only**. These translations are to elucidate the Vulgate so that Sacred Scripture can be understood, but **they are not to be considered as a sacred text**. Translations of the New Testament made by authors of the first sections in this Index are not to be used at all, since too little usefulness and too much danger attends such reading.*

*Rule IV: Since experience teaches that, if the reading of the Holy Bible in the vernacular is permitted generally without discrimination, **more damage than advantage will result** because of the boldness of men, the judgment of bishops and inquisitors is to serve as guide in this regard. Bishops and inquisitors may, in accord with the counsel of the local priest and confessor, allow Catholic translations of the Bible to be read by those of whom they realise that such reading will not lead to the detriment but to the increase of faith and piety. The permission is to be given in writing. **Whoever reads or has such a translation in his possession without this permission cannot be absolved from his sins until he has turned in these Bibles...***

- **Clement VIII** (1592-1605) confirmed Trent's proclamations against Bible translations and even **forbade licences to be granted for the reading of the Bible under any conditions.**
- **Clement XI** in *The Dogmatic Constitution*, issued on 8 September 1713, condemned **the following statements as being error.**

79. *It is useful and necessary at all times, in all places, and for every kind of person, to study and to know the spirit, the piety, and the mysteries of Sacred Scripture.*

80. *The reading of Sacred Scripture is for all.*

81. *The sacred obscurity of the Word of God is no reason for the laity to dispense themselves from reading it.*

82. *The Lord's Day ought to be sanctified by Christians with readings of pious works and above all of the Holy Scriptures. It is harmful for a Christian to wish to withdraw from this reading.*

83. *It is an illusion to persuade oneself that knowledge of the mysteries of religion should not be communicated to women by the reading of Sacred Scriptures. ...*

84. *To snatch away from the hands of Christians the New Testament, or to hold it closed against them by taking away from them the means of understanding it, is to close for them the mouth of Christ.*

85. *To forbid Christians to read Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels, is to forbid the use of light to the sons of light, and to cause them to suffer a kind of excommunication.*

- **Benedict XIV** (1740-1758) confirmed Trent's proclamations against Bible translations, proclaiming:

*"no versions whatever should be suffered to be read but those which should be approved of by the Holy See, accompanied by notes derived from the writings of the Holy Fathers, or other learned and Catholic authors."*

## Appendix 2

### Foxe's Book of Martyrs, Chapter 16 (abridged)

#### John Rogers (c 1500 – 1555)

#### Translator of the Matthew's Bible into English & First English Martyr under Mary

*John Rogers was educated at Cambridge, and afterward many years chaplain to the merchant adventurers at Antwerp. Here he met the celebrated martyr William Tyndale, and Miles Coverdale, both voluntary exiles for their aversion to popish superstition and idolatry. They were the instruments of his conversion; and he united with them in that translation of the Bible into English entitled "The Translation of Thomas Matthew."*

*On King Edward's accession, he left Saxony to promote the work of reformation in England; and, after some time, Nicholas Ridley, then bishop of London, gave him a prebend in St. Paul's Cathedral. Here he continued until Queen Mary's succession, when the Gospel and true religion were banished, and the Antichrist of Rome, with his superstition and idolatry, introduced.*

*Preaching at Paul's Cross, (an open-air pulpit in the grounds of Old St Paul's Cathedral) after Queen Mary arrived at the Tower, he confirmed in his sermon the true doctrine taught in King Edward's time, and exhorted the people to beware of the pestilence of popery, idolatry, and superstition. For this he was called to account, but so ably defended himself that, for that time, he was dismissed.*

*The proclamation of the queen, however, to prohibit true preaching, gave his enemies a new handle against him. Hence he was again summoned before the council, and commanded to keep to his house. He did so, though he might have escaped and though he perceived the state of the true religion to be desperate. He knew he could not forget a wife and 10 children, and to seek means to succour them. But all these things were insufficient to induce him to depart, and, when called to answer in Christ's cause, he stoutly defended it, and hazarded his life for that purpose.*

*After long imprisonment in his own house, the restless Bonner, bishop of London, caused him to be committed to Newgate, to be lodged among thieves and murderers.*

*After Mr. Rogers had been long and straitly imprisoned, and often examined, and very uncharitably entreated, and at length unjustly and most cruelly condemned by Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, the 4th of February, 1555, being Monday in the morning, he was suddenly warned by the keeper of Newgate's wife, to prepare himself for the fire; who, being then sound asleep, could scarce be awaked. At length being raised and awaked, and bid to make haste, he was had down, first to bishop Bonner to be degraded: which being done, he craved of Bonner but one petition, that he might speak a few words with his wife before his burning, but that could not be obtained of him.*

*When the time came that he should be brought to Smithfield, the place of his execution, Mr. Woodroofe, one of the sheriffs, first came to Mr. Rogers, and asked him if he would revoke his abominable doctrine. Mr. Rogers answered, "That which I have preached I will seal with my blood." Then Mr. Woodroofe said, "Thou art an heretic." "That shall be known," quoth Mr. Rogers, "at the Day of Judgment." "Well," said Mr. Woodroofe, "I will never pray for thee." "But I will pray for you," said Mr. Rogers; and so was brought the same day, the 4th of February, by the sheriffs, towards Smithfield, saying the Psalm Miserere by the way, all the people wonderfully rejoicing at his constancy; with great praises and thanks to God for the same.*

*And there in the presence of a great number of people, he was burnt to ashes, washing his hands in the flame as he was burning.*

*A little before his burning, his pardon was brought, if he would have recanted; but he utterly refused it. He was the first martyr of all the blessed company that suffered in Queen Mary's time. His wife and children, eleven in number, ten able to go, and one sucking at her breast, met him by the way, as he went towards Smithfield. This sorrowful sight of his own flesh and blood could nothing move him, but that he constantly and cheerfully took his death with wonderful patience, in the defence of the Gospel of Christ.*