

**Bible Doctrines I**  
**Fundamental Baptist Bible Institute**  
**Class Four and Five**  
**The Doctrine of the Bible**

**IV. TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE**

Text: Psalms 12:6 says “*The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.*” Psalms 68:11 “*The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.*” I Timothy 3:15 “*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*” We have learned that God inspired and preserved His Word; and the church used the process of canonization to recognize what writings were and were not a part of His Word. Once the Word of God was inspired, preserved, and recognized to a part of the Biblical canon, the church began translating the scriptures into every language that they could. History teaches us that the church at Antioch printed the Syrian Peshitto which was translated and carried throughout the entire world. As this text was being translated and carried to every nation on the face of the earth (500 languages by the Fifth Century). Time does not permit us to discuss the translation of the Bible into every language, but we will trace the major translations of the Bible into the English language:

**A. THE WYCLIFFE BIBLE: 1384**

John Wycliffe lived in a time when Bible reading was unknown to the common people. Isaiah 60:2: “*For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.*” Illiteracy was the rule and not the exception in his day. Even when a priest saw a copy of God’s Word, he could not read it, and if he could, he had to give its message in Latin!

In the 1340’s Wycliffe was at Oxford University when the Great Plague broke out in Europe for the first time. In less than three years, the University city of 15,000 people was reduced to 3,000. During the same time span, half of the population of England died. No home was left untouched. The sad part was that nobody had the Bible to comfort them. Nobody could read Psalms 121:1-2 “*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.*” Or Psalms 116:15 “*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*” Or John 11:25-26a “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*” Europe was filled with despair, misery, hopelessness, and sadness. Amid this, God burdened the heart of John Wycliffe to translate the entire Bible into the English language “*so that every man in the realm might read in the tongue wherein he was born the wonderful works of God*”. After all, if the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost allowed every man to hear God’s Word in their own tongue (language), why would He not want to do the same thing in every generation? John Wycliffe was influenced by Peter Waldo, an Anabaptist, whose followers became known as Waldensians. The Anabaptists had already translated the Bible into several languages from the correct texts.

Wycliffe took issue with the Roman Catholic leadership over the Bible being a closed, forbidden Book! Wycliffe preached, “*All truth is contained in Scripture...the clergy cry aloud that it is heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English, and so they would condemn the Holy Ghost, who gave tongues to the Apostles of Christ to speak the Word of God in all languages under Heaven*”. Wycliffe with the aid of John of Gaunt, the English monarch, defied his own church and in 1384 produced the first completed English Bible. Wycliffe’s work was translated from the Latin Vulgate, having nothing else to use. It was very difficult to read. It was also produced 72 years before the invention of the moveable type printing press. Thus, the Bible was copied entirely by hand. It required ten months to make one copy by a very able scribe! While it was illegal to possess, they were also extremely rare, and very expensive. To rent a copy for an hour

cost a wagon load of hay. To buy one cost a full year's salary. Truly, the "*word of the Lord was precious in those days*". - I Samuel 3:1

A man by the name of John Purvey revised Wycliffe's original work in 1388, making the translation more readable and understandable! John Purvey was a Lollard. He with others was called "Lollards" which meant babblers. The Lollards were street-preachers and soul winners. The Lollards took Wycliffe's Bible to every community, every town and village across England. Thousands learned to read and write using Wycliffe's Gospels as a textbook, and thousands came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. By the time of his death, half of England claimed to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

John Wycliffe was tried for heresy on three separate occasions, but God delivered him from death all three times. On his third heresy trial, he was condemned to die. Just as the frenzied mob was about to seize him and drag him to his demise, God sent an earthquake and in the ensuing chaos, he was rescued by his supporters and carried away to safety. He died of a stroke in 1384.

Many years after his death, Wycliffe's bones were exhumed and burned along with his books and Bibles; and the ashes were scattered into the River Swift. His enemies thought they had destroyed his life's work and memory. But the River Swift flows in the river Avon. The Avon River flows into the Severn, and the Severn into the Bristol Channel. The Bristol Channel flows into the oceans, and the oceans flow around the world. And so did the influence of John Wycliffe flow around the world, unbinding the souls of men from the chains of pagan Romanism by giving them their first glimpse of the Word of God in their own tongue. The life, devotion, and work of John Wycliffe earned him the title of "**The Morning Star of the Reformation**".

## **B. THE TYNDALE BIBLE**

William Tyndale was born in 1494. He enrolled in Oxford University in 1505. As a young man, he read Luther's forbidden books and tracts on justification by faith alone! He began to meet with fellow students in secret searching for truth. He and hundreds of his fellow scholars got saved. At the age of 23, he began reading and preaching from Erasmus' Greek-Latin Bible in English. At that time, God began to burden his heart to translate Erasmus' Greek text into the English language.

Because he was a true scholar as well as a God-called preacher, Tyndale was hired by Sir John Walsh, a wealthy British Knight to be his private chaplain and tutor to their children. Sir Walsh would invite the local bishops over to his home for dinner and then engage them into a discussion with Tyndale and watch Tyndale make Mincemeat out of them. Once a bishop got so angry with Tyndale using the Bible and beating him with Scripture that he declared, "*We would better to be without God's laws than the pope's*". Tyndale could stand no more. He leaped to his feet, pointed a finger across the table at the bishop and fired back, "*I defy the pope and all of his laws. If God be my helper ere many years, I shall cause a boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou knowest.*"

The Biblical ignorance of the English people spurred Tyndale to begin his translation work. When news of his translation project was spread abroad, he became an outlaw with a price on his head. For 11 years, he lived as a fugitive, translating the Scriptures, preaching the Word of God, and winning souls to Jesus Christ while on the run for his life. He spoke eight languages so fluently that it was said that whatever language he spoke was his mother tongue. After being on the run for eleven years, the Lollards helped him get to Germany where he met Martin Luther. Luther helped him with his English translation. Tyndale is credited with the title "**Father of the English Bible**", but he should also be called "Father of the English language". The English that he used in his Bible revolutionized the English language. He worded his Biblical text to create a picture in the mind of the reader.

The first 3,000 copies of his translation were printed in 1526 by the same family who had printed the first Bible in the world. Tyndale's Bibles were smuggled into England in sacks of flour, bales of cloth, and barrels of grain.

William Tyndale came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ by reading Luther's writings on justification by faith. When he responded to God's leading to translate the Word of God into English, it was the Lollards who assisted him in his escape from England and led him to Martin Luther's doorstep. When Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament was complete, Luther took him to the very print shop where the first printed Book in the world, Gutenberg's Latin Vulgate of 1456, was produced and there the first printed English Bible in the history of the world came into being.

In 1535 Tyndale was befriended by a man named Henry Philips, who, like Judas Iscariot before him, would in the end play the role of traitor and betrayer. He became Tyndale's confidante, and soon learned Tyndale's heart, as well as his schedule and itinerary. When the time was at hand, as pre-arranged with the Roman authorities, Philips betrayed Tyndale into the hands of the persecutors. He was arrested and jailed for the final five hundred days of his life in the dungeon of Vilvorde Castle.

Tyndale knew that his would not be the final English New Testament. Almost prophetically, he conceded that there would be other, more accurate, more accepted works to come. In the preface to his 1526 New Testament, Tyndale wrote, concerning his work, "*Count it as a thing not having his full shape, but as it were born afore his time, even as a thing begun rather than finished. In time to come (if God have appointed us thereunto) we will give it his full shape.*"

Unwittingly, William Tyndale became the principal translator of the King James Bible, the Authorized Version of 1611, because nine-tenths of the very words translated into English by Tyndale are retained in the King James Bible to this day. The New Testament of the KJB is almost word-for-word from Tyndale's translation.

Tyndale was not a translator for hire, neither was he a translator for profit, unlike the producers of the modern translations of the Bible, whose sole purpose for changing the Bible text is monetary gain. Tyndale's own words concerning his pure (not financial) motives for producing the Word of God in the English language were these: "*I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, that I never altered one syllable of God's Word against my conscience, nor would do this day, if all that is in earth, whether it be honor, pleasure, or riches, might be given me.*"

Tyndale was compelled to live in deplorable conditions in that dungeon prison cell. He was furnished with no chair, no bed, and no blanket; only a heap of vermin-infested straw strewn on a mud floor was provided for his "comfort." The fleas, the lice, the rats and the roaches crawled upon his body, biting and chewing and feeding on his flesh by day as he translated the Scriptures and by night as he tried to sleep.

Despite vehement Roman Catholic opposition, 50,000 Tyndale New Testaments made their way across England and into Europe. One was even found in the bedroom of King Henry the VIII. On October 6, 1536, the execution order was delivered. Tyndale was brought from the dungeon cell and led to the stake. He was chained to the stake and the fire was lit. Some would call it a last-minute display of mercy; some would say it was a last attempt to inflict misery and pain on William Tyndale, the holy martyr of Jesus. A hole had been bored through the stake about the height of Tyndale's head and neck, and a leather strap was inserted through the hole. This was drawn tightly about his neck. Before the flames ever reached Tyndale's body, the executioner stepped up behind the stake, grasped the leather cord, and strangled William Tyndale to death. His dying prayer, heard by all in attendance at the pitiful spectacle of the murder of this saint of God that day, was, "*Lord, open the king of England's eyes.*" Within just a few short months of that prayer, God answered, as Miles Coverdale's revision of Tyndale's Bible became the first English Bible officially sanctioned by King Henry VIII in 1537.

### **C. THE COVERDALE BIBLE: 1535**

Miles Coverdale was born in 1488. He was William Tyndale's friend, and proofreader. He revised Tyndale's translation work and in 1535 he produced the first complete translation of the Bible into the English language. John Wycliffe and William Tyndale had translated the New Testament and Tyndale was in the process of translating the Old Testament but was hung up in the Book of Psalms. It seems that translating the Psalms from Hebrew to English was nearly impossible. But sitting in prison that is all Tyndale had to work from. Coverdale found that Martin Luther had already translated the Psalms into German, and so he used Luther's Bible and translated them from German into English.

Miles Coverdale used the Itala Bible to assist him in translating. The Itala Bible was produced in AD 156 and it was the first complete copy of the Bible in the world! It is known as the old Latin Bible, translated from the Syrian Peshitto (remember Acts 11:26) into Latin by the Waldensians and Albigenses, our Anabaptist forefathers. Miles Coverdale also used the Syrian Peshitto, which was the translation put out by the Syrian church which translators used the originals in their translation of the New Testament.

At the order of King Henry VIII, William Tyndale had been burned at the stake. But do you remember Tyndale's dying prayer? "*O God, open Thou the eyes of the King of England?*" Well, his eyes weren't exactly opened to God, but within months of Tyndale's death, the King officially sanctioned the Coverdale Bible. Shortly after Tyndale's death, King Henry VIII had an argument with Rome over his desire to divorce his present wife. After having killed several wives for not producing him a son, he decided to divorce his present wife, so he asked the pope for an annulment. The pope said, "*No divorce*", so King Henry VIII said, "*No Pope*", and severed all ties with the Roman Catholic Church. This is when the Anglican Church known as the Church of England or to you and me as the Episcopal Church was born. So, the King, in open defiance to Rome allowed and authorized the Bible to be produced in the language of the people during the lifetime of Miles Coverdale.

#### **D. THE GREAT BIBLE: 1539**

At the request of King Henry VIII, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, commissioned Miles Coverdale to produce a Bible that would be licensed by the King and placed in every church in England. In 1539, Coverdale finalized and printed the Great Bible. It was named for its great size, each page measuring sixteen and a half inches tall and eleven inches wide. He could have used his own Bible that bore his name, but instead with respect and reverence for William Tyndale and his work, he used Tyndale's text and removed some of his scathing marginal notes.

King Henry VIII officially sanctioned the Great Bible for use in the churches of England, where they were chained to the pulpits. The king appointed each church an official reader to be provided for those who were unable to read. But in 1543, religious liberty again became a thing of the past as Parliament outlawed preaching or Bible reading without a license.

In 1546 all Bibles but the Great Bible were banned by King Henry VIII. (Let me say right here that he hated Baptists just as much as he hated Catholics). All the Tyndale and Coverdale Bibles were confiscated and burned along with their owners. But the very Bibles that Tyndale had died for and Coverdale was persistently hounded and persecuted for, and the Bibles that Christians were being tortured and executed for became the Great Bible, and was given royal approval and commanded to be placed in every church in England. Only those who had been granted a license could read or preach the Bible.

William Hunter, a nineteen-year old young man who was converted to Christ in his youth, was arrested for refusing to attend the mass. He was threatened and released. His heart was aflame with a hunger for God and His Word. All English Bibles had been banned and burned, except for the Great Bible, and it was chained to the pulpit in the village church. To be caught reading the Word of God without a license was a capital crime, and William Hunter was aware of that. Nevertheless, his desire and longing for God outweighed his fear for his own life. In the middle of the week, expecting no one to be in or around the church, he stealthily crept into the church

house and made his way to the pulpit, to which was chained the blessed Book that so captivated his attention. Looking around him one final time to make sure he had not been followed or discovered, he picked up the forbidden Book, opened its pages, and began to read. Hours passed as he feasted on the Bread of life. He forgot himself and his predicament, and was found out by the village's resident bishop. He was tried for heresy, for breaking Parliament's law against reading the Bible without a license, and condemned to die. He was imprisoned for nine months, where he was heavily chained and shackled, and survived on a bread and water diet. On the day of his execution he went forward cheerfully and was met by his father, who said, "*God be with thee, son William.*" William said, "*God be with thee, good father, and be of good comfort.*" The sheriff stated he had a letter from the queen, with a promise of pardon, if he would recant. He refused. A priest, with a popish book, approached him. He said, "*Away, thou false prophet! Beware of them, good people, and come away from their abominations, lest you be partakers of their plagues.*" The priest said, "*Look how thou burnest here, so shalt thou burn in hell.*" Immediately the fire was lit. William's brother said to him, "*William, think on the holy passion of Christ, and be not afraid of death.*" William replied triumphantly, "*I am not afraid.*" Then he lifted his hands to heaven and said, "*Lord, Lord, Lord, receive my spirit,*" and casting down his head into the smothering smoke, he yielded up his life for the truth, sealing it with his blood to the praise and glory of God on March 27, 1555.

In William Hunter's lifetime, one page of the Great Bible sold for a pouch of gold, approximately six ounces. That would be valued at about twenty-four hundred dollars on today's market. One complete copy of the Great Bible was traded for a four-hundred acre farm, two estate houses, and all the farm implements and buildings. **What is your Bible worth to you?**

## **E. THE MATTHEWS BIBLE**

John Rogers was born around 1500. He was trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood and became an official chaplain. However, he was converted to Christ through the soul-winning efforts of William Tyndale. After his conversion, he became Tyndale's close friend and apprentice. Because of his Scriptural conversion, he renounced his unscriptural, unnatural vow of celibacy and got married. He then moved to Wittenberg and pastored a Dutch church there. Through the Providence of God and some shrewd planning the manuscripts produced by Tyndale in the dungeon prison were not destroyed in the fire with their writer. Instead, Miles Coverdale and John Rogers ended up with them. In 1537, within a year of Tyndale's death, John Rogers secured a license from the King of England making it legal to buy, sell, reprint and read the Bible. Then Rogers put together Tyndale's Old Testament portions with Tyndale's New Testament, and used Miles Coverdale's Bible to finish the Old Testament. Officially called the Matthews Bible, they rolled off the printing press in 1537. Tyndale's personal notes are found throughout the margin of the Matthew's Bible marked with his initials and name.

The Matthews Bible is nicknamed the Wife-beaters Bible because as Rogers added his own notes to the margin, in I Peter 3:1 (*Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;*) he wrote "*And if she be not obedient and helpful unto him, endeavor to beat the fear of God into her head, that thereby she may be compelled to learn her duty and to do it*".

In 1548 King Henry VIII died and his son, Edward VI (age 10) was crowned king. Edward VI while not a Baptist was a Christian. Edward's crowning as king brought representatives from all over Europe. As custom was, one by one they presented themselves to young Edward, and laid at his feet a sword from their respective provinces. The ceremony nearly ended, the crowd stood around the young king in self-approval at the pomp and the glory of this show of respect and reverence for their new leader. Then Edward said, "*One sword yet lacketh*". *I mean the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That is the Sword by which I shall rule England*".

For the next six years, Christians enjoyed freedom as their predecessors had not known. Bibles were printed and distributed by the tens of thousands. But King Edward VI died at the age of 16. The next in line to the throne was Mary. However, Lady Jane Gray, Mary's cousin, was

virtually coerced into claiming the throne. Mary enlisted the help of the deposed Roman Catholic hierarchy and stormed London with a vengeance. Lady Jane was arrested. The new queen devised a plan by which she could spare Lady Jane of certain death. If Lady Jane would publicly renounce her faith in Christ and re-affirm her allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, she would be free to live her life in peace as a subject of Queen Mary. Lady Jane refused to recant. Now Mary would have to kill her to keep her from becoming the hero and rallying emblem of the Protestant cause which Mary was determined to rid England of. Jane was found guilty of being a heretic, as was anyone tried as a non-Catholic, and sentenced to be beheaded. The date of her execution was set for February 12, 1554. On the night before her death she wrote to her sister, Lady Katherine, at the end of her Greek New Testament, *"I send you a Book which is outwardly trimmed with gold, yet inwardly is more worth than precious stones. It is the Book of the law of the Lord. It is His testament and last will, which He bequeathed to us wretches, which shall lead you to the path of eternal joy, and if you with a good mind read it, and with an earnest mind do purpose to follow it, it shall bring you to an immortal and everlasting life. It shall teach you to live, and learn you to die, that you by death may purchase eternal life. Defy the world, deny the devil, despise the flesh, and delight yourself only in the Lord. Desire with David to understand the law of the Lord God. Desire with St. Paul to be dissolved and to be with Christ, with whom even in death there is life. Rejoice in Christ, as I do. Follow the steps of your Master Christ, and take up your cross. Lay your sins on His back, and always embrace Him. And as touching my death, rejoice as I do, that I shall be delivered of this corruption, and put on incorruption. I pray God grant you, and send you of His grace to live in His fear; and to die in the true Christian faith, from the which, in God's name I exhort you, that you never swerve, neither for hope of life, nor for fear of death. If you cleave unto Him, He will prolong your days to your comfort and His glory, to which glory God bring me now. Fare you well, good sister, and put your trust only in God, who only must help you."* The next morning Lady Jane Gray was led to the scaffold. She requested that she might be allowed to address the crowd, which request being granted she looked out over the assembled throng, many of them weeping bitterly, for she was dearly beloved for her piety and grace, remarkable for a young lady of only seventeen. Then she spoke. *"I pray you all good Christian people, to bear me witness that I die a good Christian woman, and that I do look to be saved by no other means, but only by the mercy of God in the blood of His only Son Jesus Christ: and I confess, that when I did know the Word of God, I neglected the same and loved myself and the world. Yet I thank God that of His goodness He hath thus given me a time and respite to repent."* The executioner knelt down and asked her forgiveness, whom she forgave most freely. Then she saw the block. She said, *"I pray you, dispatch me quickly."* She was handed a blindfold, which she tied about her eyes, and feeling for the block, she said, *"What shall I do? Where is it? Where is it?"* One of the standers by guiding her thereunto, she laid her head down upon the block, and said, *"Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."* At these last words, the executioner's axe fell across the neck of this lovely, innocent young martyr for the cause of Christ, and she immediately fled to the waiting embrace of her Saviour.

Bloody Mary, a devout Roman Catholic and avowed hater of Christians, determined to enslave her subjects to popery and enthrone Roman Catholicism once again. She prohibited the preaching of the doctrines of the reformed religion and had John Rogers arrested and imprisoned. Her real vendetta was against William Tyndale for starting this rejection of papal authority, but he was already dead, and John Rogers was the closest she could come to exacting her vengeance on Tyndale. At his condemnation, the bishop stood up and read the charges, *"The Catholic church has found thee obstinate and stiff-necked, willingly continuing in thy damnable opinions and heresies, and refusing to return again unto the true faith and unity of the holy mother church; and, as the child of wickedness and darkness, we, not willing that thou which are wicked shouldest become more wicked, and infect the Lord's flock with thy heresy, with sorrow of mind and bitterness of heart do judge thee, and definitively condemn thee the said John Rogers, otherwise called Matthew, thy demerits and faults being aggravated through thy damnable*

*obstinacy, as guilty of most detestable heresies, and as an obstinate and impenitent sinner, refusing penitently to return to the lap and unity of the holy mother church". John Rogers replied "I have a good conscience before God and all good men; I nothing doubt but that I shall be found there a true member of the true catholic church of Christ, and everlastingly saved. And, as for your false church, ye need not excommunicate me forth of it; I have not been in it these twenty years, the Lord be thanked therefore."*

On February 4, 1555, he was awakened out of sleep early in the morning and called upon to prepare himself for the fire. His wife and ten children (one, a baby) met him on his way to the stake. The authorities tried to offer a pardon if he would only recant, but he refused. He was asked if he would change his religion to save his life, to which he replied, "*That which I have preached, I now seal with my blood.*" As he was burning, he bathed his hands in the flames as if they had been cold water, and with great constancy received death in defence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

## **F. THE GENEVA BIBLE**

The Geneva Bible was produced during the darkest hours of the Reformation. The translators assembled in Geneva, Switzerland, because of the cruel reign of Bloody Mary and the fierce persecution of the Christians. Hundreds of men, women, boys and girls were burned during her tenure as queen, forcing thousands of English Christians to flee for their lives to the mainland of Europe. The Geneva Bible was truly the Bible of the martyrs.

In 1554 Miles Coverdale, Theodore Beza, John Knox and John Fox, author of Fox's Book of Martyrs headed the committee that produced the Geneva Bible. The refugee church in Geneva financed the production and publication. Only one hundred and fifty copies were produced in the first printing due to the scarcity of resources available to God's people living in exile in a strange land. However, the people were so energized and so excited about the Bible being made available to them in their language that for the next eighty-four years the Geneva Bible would always be on a press somewhere. Over one hundred editions of the Geneva Bible would eventually be published.

The Geneva Bible was the sixth major English translation of the Bible, and took six years to complete. The first Geneva Bible containing both Old and New Testaments was completed in 1560. The Geneva New Testament was first printed in 1557.

The Geneva Bible was the first Bible produced by a committee. The earlier English Bibles were largely the work of one man in each particular case. The Wycliffe Bible was predominantly the work of John Wycliffe. William Tyndale single handedly produced his New Testament. The Coverdale Bible was a revision of Tyndale's work by one man, Miles Coverdale. John Rogers combined the work of Tyndale and Coverdale and published the Matthews Bible. The Great Bible, produced by Myles Coverdale, was primarily Tyndale's text without his marginal notes. The Geneva Bible represents the first combined effort of a committee of godly men determined to give the people a Bible they could love and call their own.

The Geneva Bible also has the distinction of being the first English Bible to use numbers in the text to divide the verses. Verses were added first to a Greek Bible text by Robert Stephanus in 1551. Legend has it that Stephanus placed numbers beside every verse in the margins of the Bible text while being pursued for his life for his role in the production and distribution of the true, faithful Biblical text on a three-hundred mile horseback ride. His versification system has remained virtually unchanged to this day. The verse numbers in the King James Bible and most other versions in English and other languages are largely Robert Stephanus' work. Stephanus' New Testament Greek text is a part of the family of manuscripts known as "Majority Text," or "Textus Receptus," the Received Text, the underlying text of the King James Bible.

The Geneva Bible translators incorporated Stephanus' verse numbers in their Bible text to facilitate the use of the extensive study notes they placed in the margins of their Bible. The notes

were placed there to aid in Bible study and to assist the exiled believers in proper Biblical interpretation and in “*rightly dividing the word of truth.*”

The Geneva Bible was designed to be a “self-help” study Bible, in case the Christians remained in exile indefinitely. No one knew if the Christians would ever return to their homeland, their churches, or their pastors’ preaching, guidance and leadership again. No one knew if they would ever be in an organized preaching service again. The Christians might just find themselves in exile, on their own to fend for themselves, spiritually and otherwise, for the rest of their lives. Therefore, the translators set out to produce what they called “a Bible school in a single volume.” The Geneva Bible was the Bible of the people, the Bible of the persecuted Christians and martyrs of the faith, the Bible of choice among English-speaking people for over one hundred years, from its initial printing in 1560, fifty years before the King James Bible, until the time when production and printing of the Geneva Bible had been halted, a full fifty years after the King James Bible came into being.

The Geneva Bible accompanied the Pilgrims on the Mayflower in their voyage to America in 1620. The very Bible that brought comfort and peace to that great company of Christian sojourners and was carried off the boat and into the New World is kept on display at Harvard University to this day.

During the reign of Bloody Mary, the Catholic queen of England, every copy of the Geneva New Testament found in England was confiscated and burned along with its owner.

## **G. THE KING JAMES BIBLE**

### 1. The Life of King James

King James I of England was born in 1567. He was crowned King of Scotland at the age of 13 months. He became King of England upon Queen Elizabeth’s death in 1603. By the ripe old age of eight, he had mastered the Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and Spanish languages.

King James was a born again believer and a Protestant. He was tutored by Peter Young, who had studied at Geneva under Theodore Beza, John Calvin’s successor. The young prince thus developed a deep love for theology and the things of God. He also developed a deep aversion to the Roman Catholic Church. He was described as having a “keen intelligence, and a very powerful memory, for he knows a great part of the Bible by heart. He cites not only chapters, but even the verses in a perfectly marvelous way. He is recorded as attending sermons “*almost daily, on Sunday both morning and afternoon, (and) on Wednesday and Friday in the morning*”.

He wrote a devotional commentary on the book of Revelation and a work entitled “Meditations on the Lord’s Prayer”. He also published a pamphlet against the use of tobacco. In addition to that, he translated the Book of Psalms into English, but he did not put that in the King James Bible.

He was the first earthly monarch to encourage the propagation of God’s Word in the language of the people. He wanted the Word of God to be in the hands, the hearts, and the homes of his people, not chained to the pulpits or read only by scholars and theologians.

He continued to support the printing of the Geneva Bible in England, although he did not appreciate some of the marginal notes therein because of their railings against the abuses of the Church and the throne!

There is so much information on King James, but for the purpose of this study, we will leave it out. In 1604, John Rainolds approached the King with the idea of a new translation of the Bible to be produced in England. King James welcomed the idea, and commissioned fifty-four of the greatest scholars the world has ever known to produce this new Bible.

### 2. The Translators:



William Bedwell produced translations of Scripture portions into Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldee and Arabic, wrote a Persian dictionary, and translated the Gospel of John into Arabic.

Thomas Holland received his Bachelor of Arts in 1570, his Master of Arts in 1575, his Bachelor of Divinity in 1582, his Doctor of Divinity in 1584, and his Master of Divinity in 1589. Of all the translators, he was probably the most opposed to Romanism. Whenever he went on a journey away from his professoriate he would call the faculty and the students together and “commend them to the love of God and to the abhorrence of popery.”

He loved and longed for God, for the presence of God, and for the full enjoyment of Him. His soul was framed for heaven, and could find no rest till it came there. His dying prayer was, “Come, o come, Lord Jesus, thou Morning Star! Come, Lord Jesus; I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Thee.”

John Boys began reading Hebrew at age five. He often studied Greek from four o’clock in the morning till eight o’clock at night. He became so skilled in the Greek language that many of his college mates would attend a class he taught in his dormitory room at four a.m.

Lancelot Andrews spoke Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, Syrian, Arabic and fifteen other languages. It was said that he might have been “Interpreter General at the Tower of Babel.” His biographer noted: “A great part of five hours every day he spent in prayer, (most Christians do not spend five minutes every day in prayer!) and in his last illness spent all his time in prayer. And when both his voice and eyes and hands failed in their office, his countenance showed that he still prayed and praised God in his heart, until it pleased God to receive his blessed soul to Himself.”

Miles Smith was called a “walking library” and “a third University”. Considering that the other two Universities at the time were Oxford and Cambridge, which put Miles Smith in pretty prestigious company! Smith wrote the preface to the King James Bible called “The Translators to the Reader.” In it he said, “There were many chosen (for the translation work) that were greater in other men’s eyes than in their own, and that sought the truth rather than their own praise.” There are not many intellectual giants like that around anymore. I recall one man’s astute observation of theologians and “scholars.” He said, “There are some brilliant men in the world today. If you do not believe it, just stick around a little while and they will tell you just how brilliant they are.” The cause of Jesus Christ would greatly benefit from men who are “greater in other men’s eyes than in their own,” or more importantly, greater in God’s eyes than in their own.

George Abbott studied at Oxford and Balliol College. He received his Bachelor of Divinity in 1593, his Doctor of Divinity in 1597, and the same year became Master of the University. At age thirty-five, he was the youngest man upon whom that honorable position was ever bestowed.

Of the fifty-four men selected, four were college presidents, six were bishops, five were University deans, thirty were Ph.D.s, thirty-nine had Master of Arts degrees, forty-one were University professors, thirteen were highly skilled Hebrew scholars, ten were highly skilled Greek scholars, and three were eastern linguists who were as fluent in Arabic as in English.

All fifty-four men believed in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and the deity of Christ. All fifty-four were men of prayer.

Note the humility, the awe, and the gravity with which the translators approached their work, as evidenced in Miles Smith’s *The Translators to the Reader*

*“The Scriptures then being acknowledged to be so full and so perfect, how can we excuse ourselves of negligence, if we do not study them? Or curiosity, if we be not content with them? (The Scriptures are) not only an armour, but also a whole armoury of weapons, whereby we may save ourselves, and put our enemies to flight. (They are) a whole*

*paradise of trees of life, a shower of heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it never so great, a treasury of most costly jewels, finally, a fountain of most pure water, springing up into everlasting life. And what marvel? The original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man . . . the penmen, such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's Spirit. . . the matter, verity, piety, purity, uprightness; the form, God's Word, God's testimony, God's oracles, the word of truth, the word of salvation; the effects, light of understanding, stableness of persuasion, repentance from dead works, newness of life, holiness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost; lastly, the end of reward of the study thereof, fellowship with the saints, participation of the heavenly nature, fruition of an inheritance immortal, undefiled, and that shall never fade away. Happy is the man that delighteth in the Scripture, and thrice happy that meditateth in it day and night."*

If we compare the preface written by the King James Bible translators with that of the writers of the modern translations, some striking differences come to light. For instance, the Revised Standard Version translators inform their readers that all changes to the text were agreed upon by a two-thirds vote of the committee.

3. The Translation:

In 1604, fifty-four men were chosen for the monumental task of producing "*one more exact translation of the holy Scriptures into the English Tongue*". These men set aside three years of their lives for seasons of prayer and fasting in preparation for the translation work.

In 1607, the work began. Forty-seven men remained of the original fifty-four. Some had died. Some had resigned due to ill health or other unforeseen circumstances. The forty-seven men on the translation committee were divided into six companies consisting of six to eight men each who met in three locations across England, in Cambridge, Oxford, and Westminster Abbey. The entire text of the Bible was divided into six portions and each of the six committees received a portion to translate. Each man in each committee personally translated the entire portion of Scripture his committee had been assigned, then the whole committee met together and reviewed one another's work. Until they came to a one hundred percent unanimous consensus that what they had produced was an accurate (free from error), faithful, correct translation of the Word of God into the English language, the work never went beyond that committee. Each portion of the Bible from each committee passed through all six committee's hands for review, and all six committees had to agree by one hundred percent unanimous consent that an accurate, faithful, correct translation of the Scriptures was what they had before them before each section of the Bible left each committee. Then a seventh and final review committee met in 1610 and for one year perused the finished product. They, too, came to a one hundred percent unanimous vote that what they had produced was "*one more exact translation of the holy Scriptures in the English tongue.*"

These translators had hundreds of manuscripts available to them, including the corrupt text of the modern Bibles, but they chose to ignore them and use the Textus Receptus Greek and the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew, and the many other documents that are in strong agreement with these texts. After all of their work, their Bible agreed 90% with Tyndale's Bible which he alone had produced nearly eighty years before.

There is only one English Bible readily available today that comes from the lineage of William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, and the exiled translators of the Geneva Bible. Only one can be traced back through history, down the "trail of blood" of the martyrs and the saints of Jesus, who gave their lives in many instances that we could have a Bible of our own. That Book stands above the rest. **It is the King James Bible!**