



## **WILLIAM TYNDALE 1494-1536**

"Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Many in the crowd heard William Tyndale's loud and earnest prayer just before the authorities strangled him and burned him to ashes. As the flames licked Tyndale's broken body it seemed his lifelong dream and dying prayer would die with him. But both were amazingly fulfilled only two years after he died.

William Tyndale was born near the Welsh border of England in 1494. Two very important events occurred forty years earlier. The first was that the Turks had stormed Constantinople. This caused Greek scholars to flee, making the study of Greek, and with it the Scriptures in the original Greek, available as never before in the west. Secondly, in 1454 the printing press was invented, eliminating copyist errors and making the Scriptures more easily available in quantity editions. As Tyndale studied at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, he learned to speak seven languages and became skilled in Hebrew and Greek. When the Renaissance scholar Erasmus published a Greek edition of the New Testament, Tyndale discovered the truths of justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers. He realized that the English people were in darkness, following errors and superstition, because of their ignorance of the Scriptures. Therefore, Tyndale determined to give the English people a translation of the Bible that even a plowboy could understand. "Christians must read the New Testament in their mother tongue."

Tyndale went to the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, to seek permission to translate the Bible into English, but he refused. However, while in London, William came into contact with several merchants who were smuggling some of Martin Luther's writings into England. They encouraged Tyndale to go to Europe to translate, and they would help smuggle the Bible back into England. Tyndale fled England, but even on the Continent he had to be careful to avoid English spies and informers. In 1525 his New Testament was printed and smuggled back into England. King Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Thomas More were all furious at this unlicensed translation, More even accusing it as a mistranslation full of heresy.

William Tyndale's work received an amazing unintended boost when bishops bought as many copies as possible to destroy them. The price they paid provided Tyndale the desperately needed money to print even more improved and corrected editions. The King's wife, Anne Boleyn, admired this first English translation, but was unable to persuade the King to approve such a work, although her copy is now in the British Museum. The King, Wolsey and More sent agents to the Continent hoping to find and arrest Tyndale. In 1534 he was betrayed by a false friend near Brussels, arrested by imperial forces, and thrown into prison. He was found guilty of maintaining that faith alone justifies, and was executed in 1536. Two years later, King Henry VIII ordered that a copy of the Scriptures in English should be placed in every parish church. The King James Bible, the historically authorized version in the English language, has over 90% of the wording provided by William Tyndale's translation.