

## A seed broken and buried : William Tyndale

In this era of fast technologies and accessibilities, we seem to lay hand on books everywhere. More so the Bible. Bible can be accessed everywhere. From an ipad, a mobile phone, a computer or a mini Bible. I have a Bible in my travel bag, at my work desk, three different versions at my prayer spot, many more versions on my laptop. The availability is unending.

But very recently I was reading about the story of William Tyndale, who was burnt at the stake, because his life ambition was to translate the Bible into English. Can you imagine that in England so many people were burnt before the Word of God could be translated into English? The same Bible which we all have instant access.

It is a very poignant tale. A tale of passion for the Word of God and a tale of cowardly betrayal.

William Tyndale was born about 1495 at Slymbridge near the Welsh border. He received his degrees from Magdalen College, Oxford, and also studied at Cambridge. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1521, and soon began to speak of his desire, which eventually became his life's obsession, to translate the Scriptures into English. During this period 7 people were burnt at the stake for teaching their children Lord's Prayer in England. It was a very dark period. The Catholic church termed the translation of the Bible into any vernacular language as heresy and a person who commits the act can be burnt at the stake.

It is reported that, in the course of a dispute with a prominent clergyman who disparaged this proposal, he said, **If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost**

The remainder of his life was devoted to keeping that vow. Finding that the King, Henry VIII, was firmly set against any English version of the Scriptures, he fled to Germany (visiting Martin Luther in 1525), and there travelled from city to city, in exile, poverty, persecution, and constant danger.

Tyndale understood the commonly received doctrine -- the popular theology -- of his time to imply that men earn their salvation by good behavior and by penance. He

wrote eloquently in favor of the view that salvation is a gift of God, freely bestowed, and not a response to any good act on the part of the receiver. His views are expressed in numerous pamphlets, and in the introductions to and commentaries on various books of the Bible that accompanied his translations.

He completed his translation of the New Testament in 1525, and it was printed at Worms and smuggled into England hidden in bales of cloth. Of 18,000 copies, only two survive. In 1534, he produced a revised version, and began work on the Old Testament. In the next two years he completed and published the Pentateuch and Jonah, and translated the books from Joshua through Second Chronicles, but then he was captured (betrayed by one he had befriended), tried for heresy, and put to death. He was burned at the stake, but, as was often done, the officer strangled him before lighting the fire. His last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Within a century his prayer was answered in an unimaginable way. In 1611, King James of England commissioned scholars and translators to come up with a standard, authorised English translation of the Bible. From this commission, the Authorised King James Version of the Bible came into being.

Please do read John Piper's *Filling the afflictions of Christ*, where he records the untold suffering and martyrdom of the early saints for the cause of gospel and the Kingdom. Why did they have to suffer the way that they did? So many seeds have fallen before the Authorised King James Version surely came to stay as part of the English nation, its language, its culture, its tradition etc..

Before his martyrdom Tyndale was imprisoned in a dark narrow cell during a harsh winter. This is what he wrote from the prison,

I suffer greatly from cold in the head and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh which is much increased in this cell. A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin ; also a piece of cloth to patch up my leggings, my overcoat is worn out , my shirts are also worn out. He has a woollen shirt of mine, if he will be kind enough to send it. I have also with him leggings of thicker cloth for putting on above, he also has warmer caps for wearing at night. And I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening; it is indeed

wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in the study.

A few days after he wrote this he was burnt at the stake at Belgium. Till the end, he never went back to his dear England.

Reading this I ask myself if prosperity is the only blessing of the fellowship of Christ, then would we ever had this ubiquitous Bible in our hands? Looking back , without no single exception, there has been no crown without the cross.

Lord give us the grace, give us more grace to tread this narrow path of suffering which leads us to your glory. Lead us Lord through narrow paths. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Reference <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/260.html>,  
<http://www.captivefaith.org/reformation/tyndale.php>