

500 years of Tyndale

2026 is the quincentenary of William Tyndale's masterpiece, the 1526 English New Testament.

It was the first time that the whole New Testament had been translated from Greek into English and published.

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William Tyndale was born in the early 1490s in Gloucestershire. He loved the Scriptures and became a priest. After 1516, when Greek manuscripts had been published on the new-fangled European printing presses, it became possible to translate from the original Greek. Tyndale was likely inspired by Martin Luther who did just that and published the New Testament in German in 1522. So, around that time, Tyndale started to translate the New Testament into English from Greek.

He famously said to a priest who challenged him: 'If God spares my life, I will cause the boy who driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost'. Tyndale wanted the Bible in a normal language to make it relevant for everyday faith to everyone, not just the educated priests and monks.

At that time there was an old law that it was only legal to translate the Bible if it was authorised by a bishop, so he went to ask the Bishop of London. He did not get this support, so he continued his work in Germany.

City of Worms

Tyndale completed the New Testament in Cologne in 1525,

but it was not fully published until 1526, when it was printed in the city of Worms on the Rhine. Thousands of copies were smuggled up the river and across the North Sea into England, where they were eagerly bought and read.

Later, Tyndale had also learnt Hebrew and started to translate the Old Testament. He moved to the great printing centre of Antwerp. It was dangerous work because in Antwerp, Protestant opinions were considered heretical and punishable by death. Tyndale never finished this work. He was betrayed and executed for heresy in 1536.

Tremendous legacy

Tyndale's New Testament was the first New Testament to ever be printed in English. And it was edited and absorbed into the Geneva Bible, Henry VIII's Great Bible and the King James Version. Nowadays, revised forms of Tyndale are the basis for the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version and the English Standard Version. His words and phrases seeped into Shakespeare, and into many of our hymns. So, 500 years later, millions of people are still reading Tyndale.

If you are interested in William Tyndale, take a look at the website of our friends at the Tyndale Society www.tyndale.org

The latest in a long line of Bible versions whose family tree goes back to Tyndale is the *Everyday Faith Bible* (see Pages 4–5), which makes the Bible even more relevant in the workplace, or as Tyndale might have said, to the ploughboy.



Tyndale Titbits



In 2002, Tyndale was voted number 26 in the list of '100 Greatest Britons'*.



The Oxford English Dictionary quotes Tyndale's works more than 800 times.



Tyndale coined some new words which are still used in Bibles and sermons today like 'Passover' and 'scapegoat'.



Only three copies of the 1526 New Testament are known to have survived. One is in the British Library, a partial copy in St Paul's Cathedral, and a pristine copy in Stuttgart.