

William Tyndale: The Rest Of The Story

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Many of you may remember the radio show by Paul Harvey called "The Rest of the Story." I want use his format for today's commentary. I going to be talking about a man that I believe God had chosen and prepared for a most profound work. Before I begin, I want to give credit where credit is due, because a lot of the information on this man I found on the greatsite.com website, and a small amount came from Fred Coulter's booklet on this individual. I am going to refer to this guy as "Willie."

Willie was born in 1494, most probably at North Nibley (15 miles southwest of Gloucester), England. Willie was a very intelligent, brilliant young man. He enrolled at Oxford University in 1505. If you do the math, that makes him around 11-12 years old. He pretty much grew up at the University. He received his Bachelor's Degree in 1512, and in 1515, his Master's Degree at the ripe old age of 21. He proved also to be a very gifted linguist. One of Willie's associates commented that Willie was "so skilled in eight languages—Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, Italian, English, and German [English was his native language]—that whichever he speaks, you might think it his native tongue!" It is also said of him that he could carry on a conversation and switch from one language to another and never skip a beat.

In London, he was ordained as a deacon and then as a priest in the same year he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts by Oxford University.

Between 1516-1522, little is known for certain about Willie's life in these years. He may have spent some time at Cambridge University. Also, he may have worked as a priest in Gloucestershire.

Between 1522-1523, Willie acted as a tutor to the children of Sir John Walsh, a wealthy nobleman who lived at Little Sodbury Manor in Gloucestershire. It was during this time that Willie began to turn to a life of

crime. Many years later, he would find himself on the most wanted list of King Henry VIII. If there was one list in those days that you did not want to be on, it was King Henry VIII's. What was his crime? Was it murder? No. Was it robbery and theft? No. Willie's crime was that of heresy! You see, Willie had a burning desire to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek scriptures into English, which at that time was punishable by death!

In 1523, he went to London in the hope that the Bishop of London would support his plan for a Bible in English. He was sorely disappointed in this hope. The English authorities did not want the Bible in English. They feared that if people could understand it, they might start challenging the teachings of the church.

A clergyman hopelessly entrenched in Roman Catholic dogma once taunted Willie with the statement, "We are better to be without God's laws than the Pope's." Willie was infuriated with the statement, and he replied, "I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the scriptures than the Pope!"

In 1524, Willie left England to work on the mainland of Europe, hoping for more support there.

By 1525, at Cologne, Germany, he completed his translation of the New Testament. He translated from the Greek in which the New Testament had originally been written. Printing began, but it seemed likely that he would be arrested, and so he fled to Worms, Germany.

At Worms, Germany, the complete edition of the New Testament was published. It began to be smuggled into England. The Bishop of London was infuriated, and he collected up all the copies and burned them by St. Paul's Cathedral—as many as he could get his hands on.

Between 1527-1533, Willie wrote a number of books. Many of these books criticized teachings of the church. He then translated the first five books of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew.

In 1534, in Antwerp, Belgium, he went to live with an English merchant and friend, Thomas Poyntz, and there he completed a revised version of his translation of the New Testament.

In 1535, a young student whom Willie had befriended, Henry Phillips, betrayed Willie into the hands of Catholic authorities in Antwerp, where he had been translating and writing in hiding for more than five years. He was arrested and taken to Vilvorden Castle Prison near Brussels. Willie was officially charged with heresy. Amazingly, during Willie's sixteen months in prison, he continued to translate the Old Testament, which he seemed to have completed with the help of his friends, John Rogers and Miles Coverdale. Willie is thus credited with the first complete English Bible, known as the *Thomas Matthew Bible*, sometimes referred to as "Matthew's Bible."

In 1536, after sixteen months in prison, he was taken out to be executed. They were merciful, though; when they tied him to the stake, they put a rope around his neck, and a chain, and they choked him to death before they burned his body at the stake. His last words were allegedly a prayer: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

God answered that prayer! A couple of years later, King Henry VIII—maybe out of spite more than anything else; he did not like the Bishop there—ordered the church leaders to translate the Scriptures into English, which they did. . . using about 90% of Willie's translation. But it was a large Bible (called "The Great Bible"). It was about 14 inches tall, and they chained it to the podium in each church. Then in 1611, King James ordered the Catholic scholars to translate it into English, only this time, he wanted a Bible in every pew so the people in the church could read it.

But before this, in the 1550s, the church at Geneva, Switzerland, was very sympathetic to the reformer refugees that were being sought by church officials and martyred, and Geneva was one of only a few safe havens for a desperate people. Many of them met in Geneva. Willie also had been there, but this time the gather was led by Myles Coverdale (Willie's good friend) and John Foxe, author of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. In 1560, another Bible was printed called, "The Geneva Bible." It was the first Bible to add numbered

verses to the chapters. The Geneva Bible became the Bible of choice of English-speaking Christians for over 100 years.

Between 1560-1644, at least 144 editions of this Bible were published. Examination of the 1611 King James Bible shows clearly that its translators were influenced much more by the Geneva Bible than by any other source. The Geneva Bible, in fact, remained more popular than the King James Version until decades after its original release in 1611! The Geneva Bible holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America, and it was the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims. It was truly the Bible of the Protestant Reformation. They referred to it more than the Authorized King James Version. Strangely, the famous Geneva Bible has been out-of-print since 1644. Seems like the Catholic authorities could not compete, and they took care of it. The interesting thing about all this is that the Geneva Bible itself retains over 90% of Willie's original English translation.

By the way, Willie is none other than William Tyndale.

Now you know the rest of the story!