Banned. Burned. Unstoppable.





The day they burned the most dangerous book in England

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THE DATE WAS 24 OCTOBER 1526, 500 years ago, when hundreds of copies of the most dangerous book of the day were gathered, piled up and burnt by Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall on a bonfire at St Paul's Cross, just outside St Paul's Cathedral in the centre of London.

Bishop Tunstall first preached a sermon on why no one should read this book, and then the bonfire was lit. The books were copies of the New Testament, translated from the original Greek and printed in English for the first time.

King Henry VIII and England's religious rulers considered the Bible in English dangerous because people would be able to read it for themselves and not have to rely on priests to tell them what the only available translation, in Latin, said.

+ + +

Tyndale wanted ordinary people – bakers, farmers, servant girls, youngsters and ploughboys to be able to read or hear God's Word for themselves.

+ + +

But the state church gathered these precious printed books and destroyed them. Think about that — not a work of witchcraft but the New Testament. Burnt by the church because it was now in a language people could actually understand. *Why would anyone do that?*

Illustration by Jeru Nomi / @jeru.nomi / jerunomi.co.uk

Because control mattered more than truth to those in power. If people could read the Bible for themselves, they might start asking questions the authorities didn't want to be asked. They might notice they had been told things that didn't match what the Bible said.

WILLIAM TYNDALE saw straight through the whole establishment. He wasn't anti-church. He was anti-cover-up. He wanted the New Testament to show what the church should really be. He wanted people to know the real Christian message that had become masked by religious rules.

William Tyndale, an English scholar, became an outlaw and topped the authorities' most-wanted list, simply for bringing the English Bible to England. He was eventually caught and, for going against the state church, he too, like his translation of the Bible, was burnt.

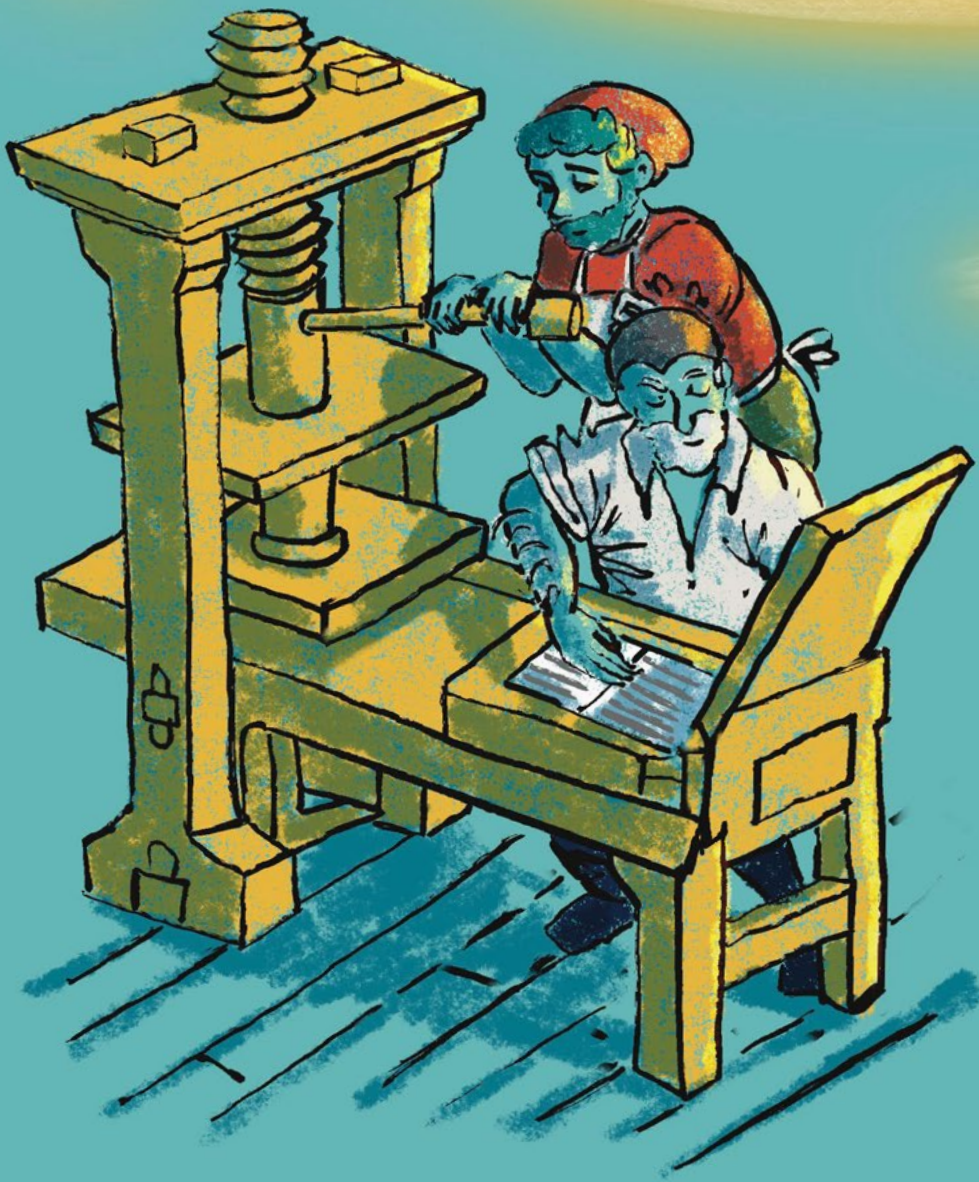
+ Exile and Execution +

IN ENGLAND 500 YEARS AGO, the Bible was locked away in the Latin language and was really only accessible to priests and scholars. One man, William Tyndale, decided that was unacceptable. He believed everyone should be able to read and hear the Word of God in their own language and not have to rely on religious leaders to discover what it said.

Tyndale was a brilliant young scholar from Gloucestershire who could read the languages that the Bible was originally written in. In fact, he could speak and read eight languages.

He wasn't interested in showing off but wanted to use his skills to translate the Bible from its original languages into English. In Germany, Martin Luther had recently completed a German translation. Why couldn't England also have the Bible in the native language? But 500 years ago, it was illegal to possess or even recite the Bible in English.

One clergyman told Tyndale, "Better to be without God's law than the Pope's." Tyndale replied, "I defy the Pope and all his laws," and added that if God spared his life, he would cause a boy that drove the plough to know more of the Scripture than the clergyman did.



The Bishop says NO to the Bible

IN 1523, Tyndale travelled to London and asked Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London, to back his plan for an English New Testament. The Bishop refused.

So Tyndale set off for the European mainland, with nothing but his mission, and began translating the New Testament directly from Greek — its original language — so as not to produce a translation of a translation.

Printing started in Cologne in 1525, but Tyndale had to flee when authorities got wind of it. He continued his work in a town with the great name of Worms! In 1526, the first printed English New Testament was finished. Copies were smuggled into England and secretly distributed hand to hand as contraband. These were the copies that Tunstall bought and burnt.

+ Tyndale Doesn't Stop +

Tyndale printed a second edition and went on to translate much of the Old Testament. With the help of many willing to risk their lives, the English Bible smuggled into England was read widely. Those later responsible for the 1611 King James Bible relied heavily on his work — his fingerprints are all over the Bible you can pick up today.

+ The Cost +

In 1535, Tyndale was betrayed and arrested near Antwerp. He was locked up at Vilvoorde Castle near Brussels, tried for heresy, and in 1536 strangled and burned at the stake.

His recorded final prayer was simple: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." And within a couple of years of his death, Henry VIII ordered that an English Bible be placed in every parish church in the country. Anyone could now go and read that most dangerous book in England.

+ Why Did He Do It? +

Because he believed the Bible wasn't a private document solely for the religious elite. It was for everyone. He loved the One the Bible is all about — the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. *JOHN 3:16* –

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.'

+ + +

Illustrations by Clara Chacón / @littlesayubu / clarachacon.myportfolio.com

Four Words

+ that Sparked a National Scandal +

TYNDALE didn't just translate — he made choices that exposed the gap between religious tradition and what the Bible actually said. Small word changes. Huge implications. Words that are faithful to the original text of the Bible. Here are four examples.

ELDER

(*NOT* PRIEST)

The Greek word *presbyteros* means "elder". Where tradition said, "priest," Tyndale translated the Greek to elder. It challenged an entire structure of religious authority built on the word "priest".

CONGREGATION

(*NOT* CHURCH)

The Greek word *ekklesia* simply means "an assembly" or "gathering". So, in Matthew 16:18, instead of the traditional word "church," Tyndale chose, "Upon this rock I will build my congregation." This one word provoked a huge question: is the church fundamentally a building and institution, or is it a gathered community of people?

REPENT

(*NOT* DO PENANCE)

The Greek word *metanoeo* means to turn, to change your mind, to turn back to God. Tyndale translated it "repent" rather than the ritualistic-sounding "do penance". That turned a religious performance into a personal, direct call: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

LOVE

(*NOT* CHARITY)

The Greek *agape* became "love" in Tyndale's version rather than the more formal, distant-sounding "charity". Read 1 Corinthians 13 with this word and it suddenly feels personal, not institutional:

'And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.'

+ + +


ἀγάπη
πρεσβύτερος
love
elder
ἐκκλησία
congregation
μετάνοια
repent

See the Different Messages?

THE MESSAGE of Bishop Tunstall and the church he stood with preached: "You need our church — our institution — to bring you to God. You need a priest and all the church hierarchy. You need to do penance, which means you pay for the sins you have done. And you must give to charity."

Whereas the Bible's message was: "Elders are simply believers who lead the gathering of God's people — who have come to understand the love of God for those who know they have done wrong but who repent and trust Jesus as their Saviour."

Sir Thomas More, one of the most powerful men in England, accused Tyndale of deliberately corrupting Scripture. Tyndale's defence was simple: he was just translating the Greek honestly.

Why Any of This Still Matters

WORDS SHAPE WHAT WE BELIEVE. If we only ever hear second-hand summaries of what the Bible "probably says", we're trusting someone else's filter. Tyndale believed we shouldn't have to. We should be able to open God's Word and read it for ourselves.

Today, that's easier than it's ever been in human history. Bibles are everywhere — in print, in apps, online, for free. The real question isn't whether we can get one — it's whether we'll open it.

An Extraordinary Linguist

TYNDALE wasn't just passionate — he was exceptionally skilled. He had a rare gift: a genuine talent for vivid, natural English.

His translation work shaped the King James Bible of 1611 and virtually every major English Bible that came after it. His English, through his Bible translation, shaped the rhythm and cadence (the flow and movement) of everyday spoken English. We still use some of his phrases today, often without knowing where they have come from:

The salt of the earth

The signs of the times

The powers that be

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak

Eat, drink and be merry

A broken heart

An eye for an eye

The apple of his eye

My brother's keeper

SOME OF THE WORDS TYNDALE COINED

ATONEMENT

SCAPEGOAT

MERCY SEAT

PASSOVER

+ + +

+ Up There With Shakespeare + in Shaping the English Language

– More Than Beautiful Words –

But Tyndale didn't sacrifice his safety and eventually his life just to enrich the English language. Beautiful phrases were a by-product. His real goal was to put the true content of Scripture into the hands of ordinary people — because he believed that its message mattered. The Bible isn't just a historical curiosity. It tells us:

What God has done in history
Who Jesus Christ actually is
Why the world is broken
What sin really is
That we need forgiveness
That salvation is found in Jesus Christ

Jesus himself pointed to exactly this purpose when he told people, "These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." *John 5:40*

Tyndale wanted the ploughboy in the field to be able to open the Scriptures and meet Jesus for himself.

+ + +

– Here's an Idea –

If you've never actually sat down and read the Bible for yourself — not just a summary, not what someone told you it says, but the actual text — why not start now?

Pick up one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Read it slowly. Ask questions as you go. And keep coming back to the central one: what does this tell me about Jesus?

– Beyond Tyndale Himself –

It would be easy to turn this into a story about one brave man's heroism and stop there. But Tyndale would have hated that. His entire purpose was to point people beyond himself — to Scripture, and through Scripture to Christ.

And the message at the heart of that Scripture is this: every one of us has fallen short. We can't fix our relationship with God through our own religious effort or good behaviour. We need forgiveness. We need reconciliation. But the Christian claim is that God has already provided exactly that, through Jesus Christ — who died for sinners and rose again.

THANKS to God's work through William Tyndale, we can still read, hear and understand the Bible for ourselves 500 years later. Here's what some of our church members have to say about the Bible…

In the Bible, we are given the richest words to have ever been spoken. Words that are trustworthy and true, full of love, hope, wisdom and life.

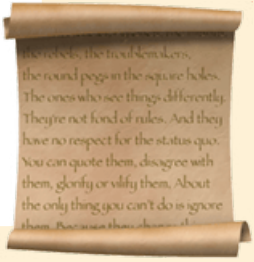
Through the Bible I've come to know the most shocking, insightful, kind, merciful, just, holy, loving, uncompromising and compassionate man that you or I could ever meet. Jesus – the man who is God with us.

The Bible shows me what God is like, teaches me to trust him, and helps me to see how the whole story of human history points to Jesus!

When I read the words in the Bible, I know that God is talking to me.

I studied history at university and on the way to lectures would walk right past the white cross where Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer were killed for convictions rooted in the Bible. As a student, I wrestled with the questions all historians confront – what is true and what does it all mean? The Bible answers those questions for humanity more profoundly and comprehensively than anything else I have found.

I'm so grateful my church opens up, reads aloud and teaches with conviction and excitement the whole Bible as the very word of God for the world today.





In the pages of the Bible I met Jesus, the friend of sinners, and I have been changed forever.

😊

I love the Bible because it has ageless wisdom for modern life.

😎

I love the Bible because it is true.

✅

The Bible describes our origins more clearly than any textbook, makes sense of our world more fundamentally than any newsletter and foretells the future more accurately than any AI algorithm.

Although written nearly 2,000 years ago, it speaks directly into every culture and circumstance and reveals the Saviour, Jesus Christ, who died and rose so we may know God as Father.

In a world where truth is up for grabs, the Bible presents itself as the one authentic true word of God in the person of Jesus Christ. You can test and apply it to the modern world, and you will be amazed at what you find.

😮

I love the Bible because through it (and hearing it taught properly) I now know the truth about who I am, who God is and what he has done to show his love for me and bring me into a personal relationship with him.

🙏

It tells me about myself and my saviour.

✝️

The stories in the Bible are the best.

📖

The more I read it, the more I see how right it is.

💯

Where is the Bible taught at Cornerstone?

If you'd like to hear the Bible opened, taught and applied, you can come to any one of these events.

MORNING SERVICE
Sundays / 10:30am / Tiffin School
The whole church community meets to hear the Bible preached, with light refreshments before and after. Age-appropriate Bible teaching runs for children and young people during the service.

EVENING SERVICE

Sundays / 6:30pm
The Cornerstone Hub
Informal and relaxed service seated around tables with others. We listen to the Bible preached, hear about the persecuted church and unreached people, and stay on for a question time (with pizza served) once a month.

KINGSTON INTERNATIONAL CAFÉ
Tuesdays / 7pm
The Cornerstone Hub
Free English lesson and a fun activity, then a hot meal and a short Bible talk with time for discussion and questions. For internationals who want to learn English and make friends.

HUB CLUB
Wednesdays / 5pm–6:30pm
The Cornerstone Hub
Free after-school club with a Bible story, crafts, games and a cooked meal, run by DBS-checked staff and volunteers. For primary school children aged 5–11.

SOUL (ages 11–14)
ROOTED (ages 15–18)
Friday evenings / The Hub
Soul (7pm–8:30pm), followed by Rooted (8pm–10:00pm). A relaxed evening to unwind, have fun and learn about Jesus together. The youth groups also meet on Sundays for more in-depth Bible studies for teens.

SEND ME A BIBLE
If you would like us to send you a Bible then please email us at **info@cornerstonechurchkingston.org** with your name and address.





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