

John Wycliffe to William Tyndale

c. 1382 Wycliffe Bible

John Wycliffe, Oxford theologian and former Master of Balliol College, and his followers (the Lollards) produce the first complete English translation of the Bible from the Latin Vulgate, not from Hebrew and Greek. Scribes produce handwritten copies, sparking a religious awakening across large parts of Britain. Wycliffe dies of natural causes in 1384.



1401 – De Heretico Comburendo

De Heretico Comburendo, an English law aimed at suppressing the Lollards, makes heresy punishable by burning. In 1408 the English Church bans any unauthorized translation of Scripture, making its possession grounds for suspicion of heresy. Over the next 130 years, many of Wycliffe's followers are arrested for possessing scraps of English Scripture and burned at the stake. ('Comburendo' is the root of our word combustion)



1415 – Council of Constance

The Council of Constance declares Wycliffe a heretic and condemns many points in his writings. It is decreed that his remains be exhumed and cast out of holy ground. Persecution of the Lollards intensifies, with dozens burned at the stake.



1428 – Wycliffe's Body Burned

Forty-four years after his death, the Council of Constance's decree is finally carried out: Wycliffe's grave is dug up, his body burned, and the ashes cast into the River Swift.



1450s – The Printing Press

Johannes Gutenberg invents the printing press, revolutionizing Bible production and availability, though not yet in English.



1453 – Fall of Constantinople

For more than a thousand years, the Latin Vulgate dominated Europe, with access to the New Testament in the original Greek severely restricted. Just before Constantinople falls to the Ottoman Turks, John of Ragusa brings a collection of Greek New Testament manuscripts to Switzerland, which Erasmus later uses to publish his Greek text.



1492 – Columbus Sails the Ocean Blue

Columbus embarks on his historic voyage discovering the New World.



c. 1494 – Tyndale's Birth

William Tyndale is born near Stinchcombe in south Gloucestershire, England (possibly at Melksham Court).



William Tyndale - Man of Courage

1516 – Erasmus' Greek NT

Erasmus publishes John of Ragusa's Greek manuscripts alongside his own new Latin translation. Through the printing press, his work spreads rapidly through a Europe hungry for reform and for Scripture in the vernacular. The 1519 edition becomes the Greek source text for both Luther's 1522 German translation and Tyndale's 1526 New Testament.



October 31, 1517 Martin Luther

On this day, Luther posts his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg sparking the Protestant Reformation.



1522 – Tyndale's Vow

Tyndale states his life mission as he famously vows to make the boy who drives the plough to know more of Scripture than the learned clergy.



1524 – Permission Refused

Tunstall, the bishop of London, refuses to grant Tyndale permission to translate the New Testament, forcing him to leave for the Continent to fulfill his life mission. Entering through Hamburg and spending significant time in Wittenberg, Cologne, and Worms, he finally settles in Antwerp.



1526 Tyndale New Testament

After escaping a near-catastrophic print shop raid in Cologne, Tyndale's New Testament is finally printed in Worms (in today's Germany). Thousands of copies are smuggled into England in bales of cloth and, for the first time ever, ordinary men and women can own a personal New Testament. Tunstall orders any copies found to be burned at St Paul's Cross in London.



1530 – Tyndale's Pentateuch

After Worms, Tyndale settles in Antwerp, where he publishes subsequent editions of his New Testament and studies Hebrew with Jewish scholars. In 1530 his translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) is published along with the book of Jonah.



1536 – Tyndale Martyred

Betrayed to local authorities, Tyndale is arrested near Antwerp and imprisoned at Vilvoorde Castle for 17 months. In early October 1536 William Tyndale is strangled and burned at the stake. His final prayer: "Lord, Open the King of England's eyes!"



1539 – England's Eyes Opened

By 1539 the Great Bible, much of it based on Tyndale's work, is present in every parish church for parishioners to access, by order of King Henry VIII.

