William Tyndale, the Wordsmith

William Tyndale left an enormous mark on the English language by coining many words and phrases still in use today:

- **Jehovah:** He composed this Name from the Hebrew Tetragrammaton YHWH
- **Passover:** Invented to accurately convey the meaning of the Hebrew word "Pesach"
- **Scapegoat:** A word Tyndale invented and used for the first time
- **Mercy Seat:** Invented for the cover of the Ark of the Covenant
- **Atonement:** Tyndale was the first to incorporate this word in Scripture for the reconciliation between God and mankind
- **Loving Kindness:** The covenantal kindness and mercy of God

Tyndale gave us much of the simple, rhythmic English phrasing that carried into the King James Version:

In the beginning God created	**A city upon a hill**
Let there be light	**A law unto themselves**
Am I my brother's keeper?	**The powers that be**
The patience of Job	**The signs of the times**
It came to pass	**Fight the good fight**
Seek, and ye will find	**The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**
Ask, and it shall be given you	**In the twinkling of an eye**
The salt of the earth	**O death, where is thy sting?**

Tyndale's target audience was the common man, and when rendered in modern spelling, his translation reads surprisingly easy. However, at the time, English spelling was far from standardized. Even our alphabet wasn't fully developed yet, and capitalization conventions weren't settled. The first few verses of John 1:1-18 (download through the QR code on the front page) are in archaic spelling, followed by the passage in modern spelling.

"If God spare my life, ere many years,
I will cause a boy that driveth the plough
shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

(Tyndale's retort to a learned clergyman)

William Tyndale's 1526 New Testament

~ A 500-Year Commemoration ~



William Tyndale
c. 1494 - 1536

2026 is a momentous year for the English Bible as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of William Tyndale's 1526 New Testament—a defining milestone in the history of the English Bible.

William Tyndale, a man of uncommon courage and linguistic ability, produced the first English New Testament translated from the original Greek. This monumental work was also the first English Scripture to be printed on the newly invented printing press. With remarkable foresight, he steered away from pulpit-sized Bibles to a format small enough to slip into a coat pocket. For the first time in history ordinary men and women could own a personal copy of the Bible. Such a work was forbidden under penalty of death, and eventually Tyndale was betrayed, strangled and burned at the stake. The Bible on our phones in our hands came at a dear price!

Born at the dawn of the Age of Exploration, around the time that Columbus set sail across the Atlantic, Tyndale was God's chosen man for the task. Though he could not have known that English would one day become the world language, his translation was foundational to that future. The King James Version, one of history's most influential books ever published, draws 70–90%—depending on the passage—of the New Testament and Pentateuch from Tyndale's pioneering work—an enduring testament to his linguistic brilliance and theological clarity.

Write the Words that Changed the World

Celebrate 500 years of Scripture in the hands of ordinary men and women by writing out John 1:1–18 from William Tyndale's 1526 New Testament. Discover the clarity of his translation and experience the peace of God as you slow down and write the passage out, word for word. Follow the QR code to download everything you need.

God soo loved the worlde/ that he gave his ōly sonne for the entent/
that none that beleve in hym/ shulde perisshe:
Butt shulde have everlastynge lyfe.

(John 3:16 Tyndale's 1526 New Testament)

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

Christopher Columbus embarks on his historic voyage across the Atlantic

c. 1494 – Tyndale's Birth

William Tyndale is born near Stinchcombe in south Gloucestershire, 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.