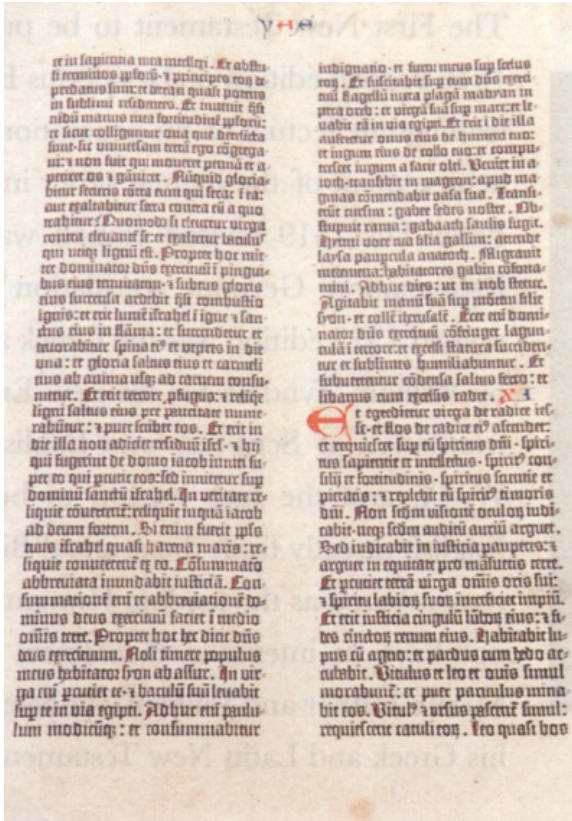


Topic 1.2: The History of the Bible in Print

Topic Progress:

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1455. The Gutenberg Bible



This example is a leaf from the Book of Isaiah.

The first substantial book ever printed in the West was – arguably – the most important book ever written: The Holy Bible (Biblia Sacra). Johann Gutenberg, inventor of the art and craft of printing with moveable type, experimented with small projects during the early 1450s. He began his Bible around 1452, probably completing it in Mainz, Germany in 1455, with his partners on the project, Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer. The text was the standard Vulgate Latin of Saint Jerome, the Biblia Latina. This work is known colloquially as “The Gutenberg Bible” and officially among bibliographers as “The 42-line Bible.” Amazingly, the first book ever printed remains one of the most beautiful books ever printed, a testimony to the meticulous care and artistry that Johann Gutenberg applied to the work.

After the pioneering work of Gutenberg, Fust, and Schoeffer, the printing revolution spread quickly across Europe. The new technology meant that the Bible was accessible to more and more people, not only the aristocracy and the clergy.

Printed books from the Gutenberg Bible to the year 1501 are called incunabula, or, in its English form, incunables, meaning “from the cradle [of printing].”

Other great early incunable Bibles include the 1460 edition known as “the 36-line Bible” or “The Bamberg Bible” and the 1462 Fust and Schoeffer Bible, the first Bible bearing a date.

The first vernacular Bible to be printed was the Mentelin German Bible of 1466, printed in Strasbourg. It was a decidedly inelegant version of the text, but significant. Deemed heretical, it was influenced by the beliefs of the Waldenses, a sect which renounced the doctrines and usages of the Roman church as far back as the 12th Century and continued from that point forward to base its faith on Scripture alone. The first Bible in Italian, Malermi's translation, was printed in Venice in 1471 by Vindelinius de Spira. The first complete Hebrew Bible was printed by the renowned Soncino family of publishers in 1488.

1516. The Erasmus New Testament in Greek and Latin

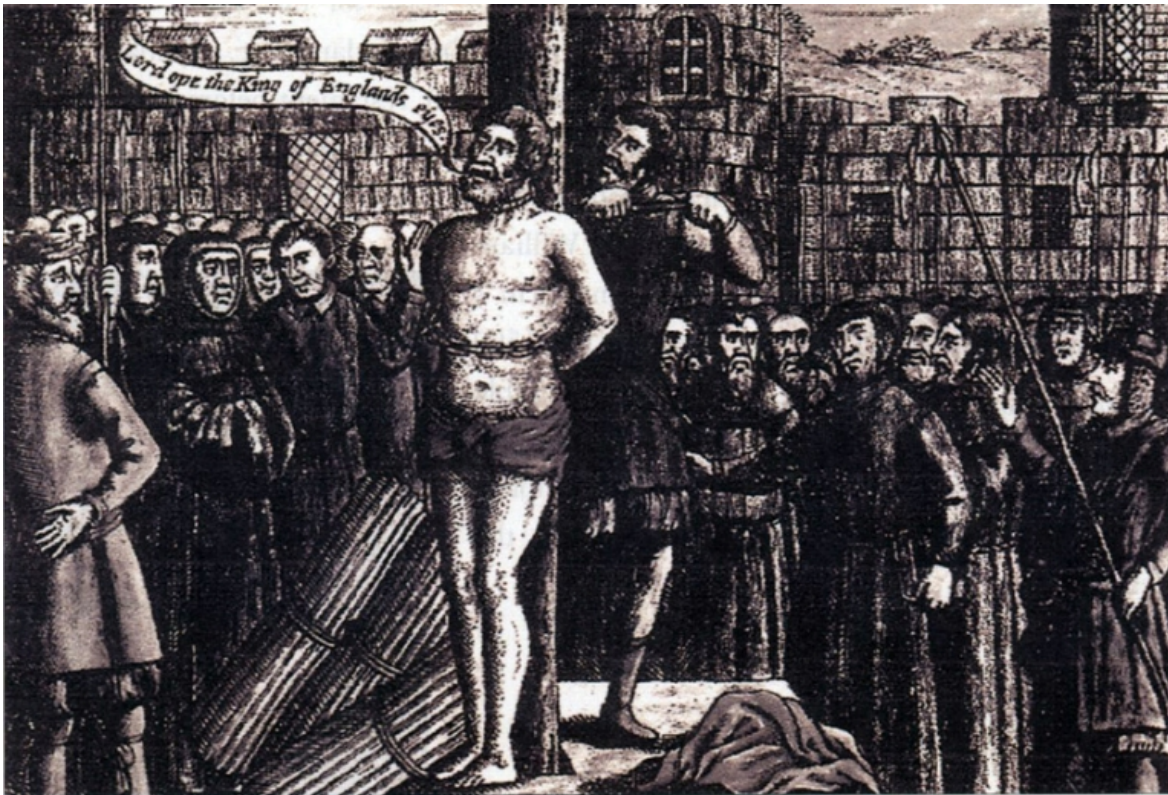


Desiderius Erasmus

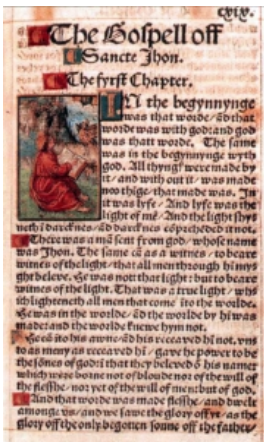
The First New Testament to be published in Greek was the 1516 Froben edition of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, the leading intellectual of his generation. It was a groundbreaking achievement of the highest order in the history of the printed Bible. His 1519 revised edition was the source book for the Reformation German translation of Martin Luther. The revised 1522 edition was the Greek and Latin source book used by William Tyndale for his new English translation, the first translation of Scripture into English since the times of John Wycliffe, and the first version to be translated into modern English directly from the original Biblical languages.

Erasmus, remembered as the leading Humanist of the Renaissance, did not have as intense a theological flame within him as did Martin Luther and William Tyndale, but there is no doubt that his Greek and Latin New Testament was the spark that lit the fires of the Reformation in England and on the Continent. Even more than the 95 Theses of Luther (1517), it was the advent of the Bible readily available in the vernacular languages of German and English that spread the Reformation in those countries.

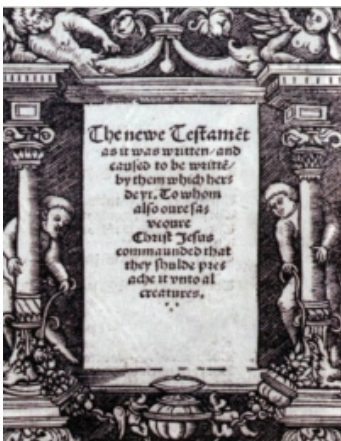
1526. The First Tyndale New Testament.



The Martyrdom of William Tyndale, 1536, as depicted in Foxe's Book of Martyrs



Gospel of John



New Testament of William Tyndale

After a sabotaged attempt to publish his English New Testament at Cologne in 1525, William Tyndale succeeded in publishing the first edition of the Bible in English with his 1526 New Testament printed in Worms, Germany by Peter Schoeffer, the grandson of the Peter Schoeffer who was assistant and partner to Johann Gutenberg in Mainz in the 1450s. Only two copies of this hugely important book remain in existence: one in London and one in Stuttgart.

William Tyndale, the greatest translator of Scripture into English who ever lived, was not permitted to finish his work. He was betrayed by a proclaimed friend, arrested, and imprisoned in Vilvoorde Castle in Belgium. He was held there for 500 days before he was strangled to death and burned at the stake for his "crime" of bringing Scripture to the English language. Tyndale finished about half of the Old Testament before his martyrdom in 1536. His work was continued in his spirit by the dedicated John Rogers and Miles Coverdale, but it would not be until William Whittingham's work on the 1500 "Geneva" Bible that a scholar sufficiently skilled in the Hebrew language would complete the Old Testament in English directly from the Hebrew text.

1537. The Reformation German Bible of Martin Luther



October 31, 1517: Martin Luther & the 95 Theses



1536 Wittenberg edition of Luther's complete Bible

Martin Luther was the leading figure of the early Reformation on the continent. His “September” New Testament, published in Wittenberg in 1522, and his partial Old Testament of 1523 led to his first complete Bible in German in 1534, one of the most important books ever published – one which had a profound impact on the history of religious thought and on the development of the German language.

Luther’s German New Testament was translated from the Greek of Erasmus, using the second edition. In the list of books given in the preliminary matter, four (Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation) are separated from the others and not included in the numeration. For his Old Testament, Luther consulted primarily the Hebrew Bible printed at Brescia in 1494. Luther’s copy of this book is now preserved in Berlin. Luther also consulted the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the new Latin versions of Sanctes Pagninus and Sebastian Munster, and commentaries such as the Glossa Ordinaria and those of Nicolaus de Lyra. In his revised 1534 Bible, Luther was the first to separate the books of the Apocrypha from the body of the Old Testament and placed them as a collection between his Old and New Testaments.

1537. The “Matthew’s” Bible.



Matthew's Bible

The “Matthew’s” Bible is John Roger’s completion of the William Tyndale translation. This complete English Bible, welding together the best work of William Tyndale and improving on the completion efforts of Miles Coverdale, is the real primary version of our English Bible, more so than the 1535 English Bible of Miles Coverdale.

John Rogers uses the pseudonym Thomas Matthew, not for himself, but for the martyred William Tyndale, because any association with William Tyndale was still outlawed. This Bible was able to be printed by “The King’s Most Gracious License” – which would not have been granted to a “Tyndale” Bible. Yet, in silent tribute to Tyndale, John Rogers places the large flourished initials “W.T.” at the end of Malachi, as a sign of Tyndale’s authorship to the “secret society” underground of like-minded Reformers. (The second edition of the “Matthew’s” Bible was printed during the brief reign of Edward VI in 1549 and openly contains the preface “William Tyndale Unto the Christian Reader.”)

1539. The First Edition of the Miles Coverdale “Great Bible”



1539 "Great Bible"

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of
Canterbury

To Miles Coverdale goes the honor of the first complete Bible in English, his 1535 edition. That edition was not as fine a rendering as the 1537 "Matthew's" Bible which John Rogers saw through the press, because Rogers likely had more extensive access to William Tyndale's final manuscripts. Coverdale took it upon himself to improve even upon the "Matthew's" Bible, under the direct patronage of Thomas Cromwell, and in 1539 published the first edition of what is known as the "Great" Bible, one of the grandest and most beautiful Bibles ever produced. The Second and subsequent editions of Coverdale's "Great" Bible are sometimes referred to as "Cranmer's" Bible because the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, contributed a Prologue to those versions. Miles Coverdale delivered a particularly mellifluous rendering of the Book of Psalms, and it is his version of the Psalter that has been generally maintained in the Bible of the Church of England, and the various editions of the Book of Common Prayer.

As the reign of King Henry VIII continued, the Bible in English was frequently reprinted. Under his son and successor, young Edward VI (reigned 1547-1552), the Bible in English continued to flourish, with some forty editions appearing. When Queen Mary ("Bloody Mary") took the throne in 1553, she wished to repress Scripture in English and again the English Bible became a forbidden book. Among the first martyrs Queen Mary sent to the stake for heresy were John Rogers, the follower of William Tyndale who