

## English Bible History

### Coverdale through the Douay/Rheims Bible

**Myles Coverdale** and John “Thomas Matthew” Rogers had remained loyal disciples the last six years of Tyndale's life, and they carried the English Bible project forward and even accelerated it. Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament, and in **1535** he printed the first complete Bible in the English language, making use of Luther's German text and the Latin as sources. Thus, the first complete English Bible was printed on **October 4, 1535**, and is known as the **Coverdale Bible**.



**John Rogers** went on to print the second complete English Bible in **1537**. It was, however, the first English Bible translated from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew & Greek. He printed it under the pseudonym "**Thomas Matthew**", (an assumed name that had actually been used by Tyndale at one time) as a considerable part of this Bible was the translation of Tyndale, whose writings had been condemned by the English authorities. It is a composite made up of Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament (1534-1535 edition) and Coverdale's Bible and some of Roger's own translation of the text. It remains known most commonly as the **Matthew-Tyndale Bible**. It

went through a nearly identical **second-edition printing in 1549**.

In **1539**, **Thomas Cranmer**, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the bequest of King Henry VIII to publish the "Great Bible". It became the first English Bible authorized for public use, as it was distributed to every church, chained to the pulpit, and a reader was even provided so that the illiterate could hear the Word of God in plain English. It would seem that William Tyndale's last wish had been granted...just three years after his martyrdom. Cranmer's Bible, published by Coverdale, was known as the **Great Bible** to its great size: a large pulpit folio measuring over 14 inches tall. Seven editions of this version were printed between April of **1539** and December of **1541**.



It was not that **King Henry VIII** had a change of conscience regarding publishing the Bible in English. His motives were more sinister... but the Lord sometimes uses the evil intentions of men to bring about His glory. King Henry VIII had in fact, requested that the Pope permit him to divorce his wife and marry his mistress. The Pope refused. King Henry responded by marrying his mistress anyway, (later having two of his many wives executed), and thumbing his nose at the Pope by renouncing Roman Catholicism, taking

England out from under Rome's religious control, and declaring himself as the reigning head of State to also be the new head of the Church. This new branch of the Christian Church, neither Roman Catholic nor truly Protestant, became known as the Anglican Church or the Church of England. King Henry acted essentially as its "Pope". His first act was to further defy the wishes of Rome by funding the printing of the scriptures in English... the first legal English Bible... just for spite.

The ebb and flow of freedom continued through the 1540's...and into the 1550's. After King Henry VIII, King Edward VI took the throne, and after his death, the reign of **Queen "Bloody" Mary** was the next obstacle to the printing of the Bible in English. She was possessed in her quest to return England to the Roman Church. In **1555**, John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers and Thomas Cranmer were both burned at the stake. Mary went on to burn reformers at the stake by the hundreds for the "crime" of being a Protestant. This era was known as the Marian Exile, and the refugees fled from England with little hope of ever seeing their home or friends again.



In the 1550's, the Church at Geneva, Switzerland, was very sympathetic to the reformer refugees and was one of only a few safe havens for a desperate people. Many of them met in Geneva, led by **Myles Coverdale** and **John Foxe** (publisher of the famous **Foxe's Book of Mayrtrs**, which is to this day the only exhaustive reference work on the persecution and martyrdom of Early Christians and Protestants from the first century up to the mid-16th century), as well as Thomas Sampson and William Whittingham. There, with the protection of the great theologian, **John Calvin** (author of the most famous theological book ever published, **Calvin's Institutes of the Christian**

**Religion**) and **John Knox**, the great Reformer of the Scottish Church, the Church of Geneva determined to produce a Bible that would educate their families while they continued in exile.

The New Testament was completed in **1557**, and the complete Bible was first published in **1560**. It became known as the **Geneva Bible**. Due to a passage in Genesis describing the clothing that God fashioned for Adam and Eve upon expulsion from the Garden of Eden as "Breeches" (an antiquated form of "Britches"), some people referred to the Geneva Bible as the Breeches Bible.



The Geneva Bible was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters, so that referencing specific passages would be easier. Every chapter was also accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references so thorough and complete that the Geneva Bible is also considered the first English "Study Bible". William Shakespeare quotes hundreds of times in his plays from the Geneva translation of the Bible. The

Geneva Bible became the Bible of choice for over 100 years of English speaking Christians. Between **1560** and **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 itself retains over **90%** of William Tyndale's original English translation. The Geneva in fact, remained more popular than the King James Version until **decades** after its original release in **1611!** The Geneva holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America, and the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims. It is truly the "Bible of the Protestant Reformation." Strangely, the famous Geneva Bible has been out-of-print since 1644, so the only way to obtain one is to either purchase an **original printing of the Geneva Bible**, or a less costly **facsimile reproduction of the original 1650 Geneva Bible**.

With the end of Queen Mary's bloody reign, the reformers could safely return to England. The Anglican Church, now under Queen Elizabeth I, reluctantly tolerated the printing and distribution of Geneva version Bibles in England. The marginal notes, which were vehemently against the institutional Church of the day, did not rest well with the rulers of the day. Another version, one with a less inflammatory tone was desired, and the copies of the Great Bible were getting to be decades old. In **1568**, a revision of the Great Bible known as the **Bishop's Bible** was introduced. Despite 19 editions being printed between **1568** and **1606**, this Bible, referred to as the "rough draft of the King James Version", never gained much of a foothold of popularity among the people. The Geneva may have simply been too much to compete with.

By the **1580's**, the Roman Catholic Church saw that it had lost the battle to suppress the will of God: that His Holy Word be available in the English language. In **1582**, the Church of Rome surrendered their fight for "Latin only" and decided that if the Bible was to be available in English, they would at least have an official Roman Catholic English translation. And so, using the corrupt and inaccurate Latin Vulgate as the only source text, they went on to publish an English Bible with all the distortions and corruptions that Erasmus had revealed and warned of 75 years earlier. Because it was translated at the Roman Catholic College in the city of Rheims, it was known as the **Rheims New Testament** (also spelled Rhemes). The **Douay Old Testament** was translated by the Church of Rome in **1609** at the College in the city of Douay (also spelled Doway & Douai). The combined product is commonly referred to as the "**Doway/Rheims**" **Version**. In **1589**, Dr. William Fulke of Cambridge published the "Fulke's Refutation", in which he printed in parallel columns the Bishops Version along side the Rheims Version, attempting to show the error and distortion of the Roman Church's corrupt compromise of an English version of the Bible.

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