

LutherFacts #34 - Martin Luther and William Tyndale

When Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, he could not have known that, over time, his effort would also influence the emergence of an English-language version. This story begins when English scholar William Tyndale (1494-1536), who embraced Luther's stress on justification by faith, traveled to Wittenberg in 1524. While there, having already begun working on the New Testament, he remained—living in Worms and Hamburg—to complete an English translation of the Old Testament. In 1526, using the new printing press technology, German printers produced the entire Tyndale Bible, some copies of which were then shipped over to England. At first Henry VIII endorsed the new translation, but then turned against Tyndale for criticizing his eventual marriage to Anne Boleyn. After a decade of persecution, the translator was executed and burned at the stake. Later biblical translations—all built off of the Tyndale Bible—would lead eventually in 1611 to the publication of the King James Version. Martin Luther's conviction that the Word of God must be available in the vernacular thus led to a Bible that would become the central biblical translation for the English-reading world.