Don’t Take Your English Bible for Granted

*by Harry Osborne*

The wide availability of our English Bibles today stands in stark contrast to the beginning of such efforts. John Wycliffe made the first English translation of the Bible, it from the Latin Vulgate and each copy took about 8 months to reproduce a single copy since it had to be written out by hand. After Wycliffe’s death in 1384, the Catholic “Council of Constance” condemned him as a heretic. His remains were dug up, burned, and the ashes thrown into the river at the command of Pope Martin V in 1428. In 1526, a German printing press was used to publish 600 of William Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament. They had to be secretly smuggled back into England. Why? The Roman Catholic exercised control over the Holy Roman Empire as well as England, with Henry VIII still a loyal Catholic at that time. The Roman Catholic Church’s abhorrence for Bibles translated into the vernacular can be seen from a simple look at historical fact.

Near the end of the 14th century, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Arundel, said: “That pestilent and most wretched John Wycliffe, of damnable memory, a child of the old devil, and himself a child and pupil of the anti-Christ… crowned his wickedness by translating the Scriptures into the mother tongue.”

About the same time, Catholic historian Henry Knighton stated: "John Wycliffe translated the Gospel from Latin into the English… made it the property of the masses and common to all and… even to women… and so the pearl of the Gospel is thrown before swine and trodden under foot and what is meant to be the jewel of the clergy has been turned into the jest of the laity… has become common…."

A synod of clergy in 1408 decreed: “It is dangerous…to translate the text of Holy Scripture from one language into another…we decree and ordain that no-one shall in future translate on his authority any text of Scripture into the English tongue or into any other tongue, by way of book, booklet or treatise. Nor shall any man read, in public or in private, this kind of book, booklet or treatise, now recently composed in the time of the said John Wycliffe…under penalty of the greater excommunication.”

In his book, A World Lit Only by Fire, historian William Manchester wrote this about the reaction to these English translations of the Bible: "To the bishop of London this was an intolerable, metastasizing heresy. He bought up all that were for sale and publicly burned them at St. Paul's Cross. But the archbishop of Canterbury was dissatisfied; his spies told him that many remained in private hands. Protestant peers with country houses were loaning them out, like public libraries. Assembling his bishops, the archbishop declared that tracking them down was essential - each was placing souls in jeopardy - and so, on his instructions, dioceses organized posses, searching the homes of known literates, and offered rewards to informers - sending out the alarm to keep Christ's revealed word from those who worshiped him" (A World Lit Only By Fire, 204-205).

And what happened to Tyndale for his part in translating the Bible into English? First, he was arrested and imprisoned. In 1536, after being tried and convicted for heresy he was publicly tied to a stake, strangled to death and then his body was burned.

With these facts in mind, never forget four things: (1) The Catholic Church can only thrive with people ignorant of the Scripture. (2) If the Roman Catholic Church had the power to do so, it would **still** keep people from being able to read the Scripture for themselves, as the canon law justifying the above persecution has never been renounced by the Catholic Church. (3) The ready availability of our Bibles should never be viewed lightly – courageous men died to make our access to it possible. (4) God guided the events of history and raised men up for such a time so that He could fulfill His promise that the seeker would always be able to find and His word would endure forever (Matthew 7:7-8; Proverbs 8:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

Do you have the proper appreciation for your English Bible? God’s great wisdom and power as well as the blood of fearless men made it possible for you to have ready access to the Scripture translated into your own language. When we are counting our blessings, this is one to remember!

An Eye for an Eye
*by Joe R. Price*

The law of Moses contained strict laws of punishment which served to deter crime as well as punish the guilty:

*But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.*(Exod. 21:23-27)

Now, fast forward to April, 2013 and Saudi Arabia:

“The case of 24-year-old Ali al- Khawahir was brought to light by recent Saudi news reports. Khawahir, who was reportedly sentenced to qisas (retribution) in the town of Al-Ahsa, could be paralyzed from the waist down unless he pays one million Saudi riyals – US $270,000 -- in compensation to the victim.

“Khawahir has spent the last 10 years in prison. He had allegedly stabbed his friend in the back, rendering him paralyzed from the waist down in or around 2003. Khawahir was only 14 years’ old at the time.” (“Britain Urges Saudi Arabia Not To Carry Out Paralysis Sentence”, RTTNews.com)

Those who demand we apply the Law of Moses today should ponder the implications of that notion. If you demand, for example, Sabbath-keeping today, will you join Muslims in an “eye for an eye” justice? When is the last time you stoned a rebellious son (Deut. 21:18-21)? What about plucking out the eye of an offender?

Do not misunderstand. We are all for punishment that fits the crime, deterring crime and punishing the evildoer (Rom. 13:1-6). But, the penal code of the Law of Moses applied to Israel, not all nations (Deut. 5:1-3). Its religious code does not apply today, either (Col. 2:14-17).

By definition, law does not contain mercy for violators, only punishment (Rom. 3:19; 6:23; Gal. 3:10, 22). Grace is available to sinners in Christ, not in Moses (Jn. 1:17). God’s mercy is offered to sinners the world over in the gospel of Christ (Mk. 16:15-16; Tit. 2:11-12). Jesus saves – not Moses or Mohammed – Hear Him! (Matt. 17:5)