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Question 83 - What are the facts regarding the Matthew's Bible?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

83. What are the facts regarding the Matthew's Bible?

- A. The Matthew's Bible was compiled by John Rogers in 1537. Rogers desired a version which would contain all the work of his friend Tyndale, translated from the original. It is known as the first revision of the Tyndale Bible.
- The Matthew's Bible is the Tyndale Bible complete. It forms the real basis of all later revisions, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Bishops' Bible, and the King James' Version. All these came from Tyndale, through the Matthew's Bible. Eleven years before, Tyndale's New Testament was publicly burned; now it is published under another name with the King's consent.
- B. It was published just one year after Tyndale's death.
- C. This version was prepared by John Rogers, who used the pseudonym Thomas Matthew. The reason for this was that Rogers, a known friend of Tyndale, felt his work would be more acceptable to various authorities if this relationship was not known. Rogers would later be burned to death during the reign of Bloody Mary in 1555. Matthew's Version was the first revision of the Tyndale Bible. It was approved by King Henry VIII, who had hated Tyndale and his work. A divine irony is seen here.
- D. The manuscripts were given for publication to Richard Grafton, a merchant in Antwerp who felt constrained to go to England and present a copy to Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in an effort to get approval for an English Publication. Cranmer examined the book and was greatly impressed, but he felt he was not the best person to obtain the king's approval. He therefore asked Thomas Cromwell to submit it and obtain permission from Henry VIII. The permission he was asking for was temporary: it was to be only until a better translation could be produced by the bishops – which, suggested Cranmer, “will not be till a day after doomsday.” The king took the book and looked through it. At the end of Malachi, Rogers had etched the initials W.T., standing for William Tyndale. The letters were large enough to cover half the page, but either the King's fingers skipped the page, or he did not look at the initials properly, or his mind was too dull to interpret their significance; as far as he could see, Tyndale's name was not associated with the new Bible. The book had a pleasant dedication to His Majesty, and Henry thought that it might be a useful implement to weaken the grip of Rome on England. He handed it back to Cromwell and granted permission, provided Cromwell could get Cranmer's approval! Cromwell had succeeded, and an edition of 1,500 copies was sold in England as the first

“authorized” version. According to its title page, it was published “by the king’s most gracious license.”

This was a red-letter day in the history of the English Bible. Though the Matthew Bible was not to survive for long, it paved the way for later editions and translations. It succeeded where Coverdale’s had failed, in obtaining the king’s authorization.

(*The Indestructible Book*. Ken Connally. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1996. p. 150)

- E. A royal declaration commanded it to be bought by every Parish Church and made accessible on a reading desk for the public.