



William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536), father of the English Bible;  
 National Portrait Gallery, London, artist unknown.



Chap. iii.

# William Tyndale and the Language of At-one-ment

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**W**illiam Tyndale (d. 1536), reformer and translator, is the true father of the English Bible. His English translations of the Bible provided the basis for the King James translation, and through his translations, Tyndale became one of the founders of the modern English language. In the process of translating the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English, Tyndale coined several new English words—transforming older English words or in some cases inventing unique and striking new English words—that have since become central terms in religious discourse. From a study of just a few of these words, we can better understand Tyndale’s genius for language, his methodology, and his theology, and we can gain insight into the complexity of translation. Most important, we can better appreciate the gift Tyndale gave to English speakers: the word of God in our own language.

A constellation of words coined by Tyndale relate to the doctrine of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Tyndale was the first to use the terms *Jehovah*, *Passover*, *atonement*, *scapegoat*, and *mercy seat* in his translation of the Old Testament. These terms have found their way into the discourse of Jews and Christians in their reading and understanding of the Old Testament and have provided for Christians the vocabulary that shapes their understanding of the Old Testament’s foreshadowing of the coming of Christ and the nature of his redemption. In particular, Latter-day Saints will

recognize the word *atonement*, with its variations, as an important word in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and our everyday religious discussion.

Born in Gloucestershire, England, William Tyndale studied at Oxford and possibly Cambridge. He joined the reform movement there, and in 1524 he moved to Hamburg, Germany, never to return to his native country. The reformers all recognized the Bible as the authoritative voice of God that superseded the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. John Foxe records Tyndale's early passion for the Bible. He recounts that Tyndale happened to be in the company of a learned man, and in communing and disputing with him about the issue of the Bible and the Catholic Church, the learned man said, "We were better without God's law than the pope's. Maister Tyndall hearing that, answered him, I defy the Pope and all his laws, and said, if God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."<sup>1</sup>

In 1522 Tyndale, following the belief of the reformers that it was necessary to make the scriptures available to people in their own language (a cause that was also championed by Martin Luther, his contemporary), conceived the plan of translating the Bible into English.

His translation was not the first. There is actually a long history of the translation of the word of God into English, beginning with a cowherd from Whitby named Caedmon, who paraphrased some biblical passages in AD 670. Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne, translated the Psalter from the Vulgate in about 700, and the Venerable Bede (673–735) translated portions of the Vulgate. He died while translating the Gospel of John. King Alfred the Great (871–901) translated parts of Exodus and Acts, and the Lindisfarne Gospels (ca. 687) had an interlinear English translation between the Vulgate Latin lines. All of these were translated into Anglo-Saxon, or Old English. John Wycliffe and his associates were the first to translate the whole of the Bible into English in about 1380, a work that predated the printing press and was thus disseminated in manuscript form.<sup>2</sup>

But whereas Wycliffe's translation was made from the Vulgate into Middle English, Tyndale was the first to translate the Bible into Modern English from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. He was a trail-blazing pioneer among English translators because there was no model translation from Hebrew or Greek to follow.<sup>3</sup> Because of increasing

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hostility against him and the other reformers, Tyndale realized it was impossible to do the translation in England and thus moved to the mainland of Europe. While working in Cologne, Worms, and Antwerp, he published his English translation of the New Testament in 1526, the Pentateuch in 1530, and the book of Jonah in 1531. He then published revised versions of both his New Testament and the Pentateuch in 1534, and he left behind a manuscript copy of his translation of Joshua through Chronicles, which was incorporated into later English Bibles.<sup>4</sup> Because he was wanted by the Catholic Church for his heretical views and his publication of the Bible into English, he was betrayed by an associate, kidnapped by authorities of the church in Antwerp, and taken to Vilvorde (near Brussels), where he was tried for heresy and executed in 1536. His last words were, “Lord open the King of England’s eyes.”<sup>5</sup> Little did he know that just before his death, King Henry VIII—as a part of his break with the Catholic Church—had granted permission for the circulation of the English Bible. The Bible that was circulated was produced by Matthew Coverdale and was largely based on Tyndale’s work.

Because of the printing press, public demand, and financial incentive to publish his work, the Tyndale Bible was widely disseminated and had great impact on English speakers and the Bible itself. In 1604 the King James translators were commissioned to produce a new translation. It was to be based on previous translations. Of all the translations, Tyndale’s was by far the most influential. For centuries, the King James Bible has been rightfully praised as a literary masterpiece, as the prime exemplar of the English language, and as a text that has shaped modern English. But in the last half of the twentieth century, scholars have discovered that much of the genius of the language of the King James Version was, in fact, originally the work of William Tyndale.<sup>6</sup> The translation of the word of God into the modern spoken language of English, from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, was an extraordinary achievement in the sixteenth century, not because scholars did not know Hebrew and Greek but because English had not established itself as a language for serious matters. The educated elite—those trained in the classical languages of Greek and Latin—considered English a barbaric language without the complex grammatical nuances necessary to properly express the word of God. In fact, a debate was held in 1401 at Oxford between a man named Richard

# The Gospell off

Sancte Jhon.

The fyrst Chapter.



**I**n the begynnynge was that worde / and that worde was with god: and god was thatt worde. The same was in the begynnynge wyth god. All thyngs were made by it / and with out it / was made noo thige that made was. In it was lyfe / And lyfe was the light of mē / And the light shyneth i darcknes / and darcknes cōprehēded it not.

There was a mā sent from god / whose name was Jhon. The same cā as a witnes / to beare witnes of the light / that all men through hi myght beleve. He was nott that light: but to beare witnes of the light. That was a true light / whiche lighteneth all men that come i to the worlde. He was in the worlde / and the worlde by hi was made: and the worlde knewe hym not.

Because i to his awne / and his receaved hi not. vns to as meny as receaved hi / gave he power to be the sōnes of god: i that they beleved o his names which were borne not of blonde nor of the will of the flesshe / nor yet of the will of men: but of god.

And that worde was made flesshe / and dwelt amonge vs / and we sawe the glory off yt / as the glory off the only begotten sonne off the father.

Tyndale New Testament, 1526, John 1:1–14, printed for Tyndale by Peter Schoeffer, Worms; “And that worde was made flesshe, and dwelt amonge vs, and we sawe the glory off yt, as the glory off the only begotten sonne off the father.”

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Ullerston and his critics as to whether English was an appropriate language for the translation of the Bible. The decision rendered by Thomas Arundel, the archbishop of Canterbury, effectively banned the English language from any aspect of English church life: "We therefore legislate and ordain that nobody shall from this day forth translate any text of the Holy Scriptures on his own authority into the English."<sup>7</sup> In addition, at the time of Tyndale, the shift from Middle to Modern English had just begun. Tyndale's translation, along with the King James Version and the works of Shakespeare, would establish Modern English as we know it today.

It is said that Tyndale was a master of seven foreign languages,<sup>8</sup> but most importantly, he was a master of his native language, English. Translators of the Bible before Tyndale relied on the Latin Vulgate (the official version of the Bible for the Catholic Church), but Tyndale believed that the original Hebrew and Greek of the scriptures were languages more suitably rendered into English than Latin: "Saynt Hierome also translated the bible into his mother tongue [i.e., the Latin Vulgate]. Why maye not we also? They wyll saye, it can not be translated in to our tongue, it is so rude. It is not so rude as they are false lyers. For the Greke tongue agreeth more with the englyshe, than with the latyne. And the properties of the Hebrue tongue agreeth a thousande tymes more with the englyshe, than withe the latyne."<sup>9</sup> In the case of Hebrew, scholars have noted that Tyndale was right in sensing the superiority of English to Latin in matters of rendering Hebrew syntax. Scholars have observed that Hebrew and English have similar word orders and that in his English translation, Tyndale masterfully rendered the syntax of the original Hebrew into a fluid and rhythmical English prose that in turn influenced English writers.<sup>10</sup>

### TYNDALE'S WORDS "FITLY SPOKEN"

In the process of his translation, Tyndale bequeathed much of the memorable English phraseology that we associate with the sacredness of the word of God. Truly, for Tyndale and for us, "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). Consider the familiar cadences of the following phrases created by Tyndale: "let there be light, and there was light," "male and female created he them," "who told thee that thou wast naked?" "my brother's keeper," "the Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee," "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all



thine heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might,” “the salt of the earth,” “the powers that be,” “a law unto themselves,” “filthy lucre,” and “fight the good fight.” These phrases have become impressed in the English language, both in religious discourse and in proverbial expressions. One scholar thus assesses Tyndale’s contribution to language: “It would be hard to overpraise the literary merits of what he had done. Much of his rendering would later be incorporated into the Authorized or King James Version, and the rhythmical beauty of his prose, skillful use of synonyms for freshness, variety, and point, and ‘magical simplicity of phrase’ imposed itself on all later versions, down to the present day.”<sup>11</sup>

Tyndale faced a great challenge in rendering Hebrew and Greek words into his native English. Words are powerful instruments in the transfer of meaning, and thus the translation of words is very tricky. Within a language, words develop complex semantic fields—that is, sets of meanings depending on context and usage. Thus any specific word is often very difficult, if not impossible, to accurately translate into another language because a corresponding term with the same semantic fields may not be found. As the old Italian proverb goes, *traduttore traditore*—“a translator is a traitor.” Any rendering of a text from one language to another inevitably involves interpretation and the changing of meaning.

The choice of words can also be theologically loaded. Since Tyndale was a Protestant, his translation was carefully phrased in order to state the viewpoints of the reformers. In several notable cases, Tyndale deliberately chose to render words that had a long legacy in Catholicism with new terms that Catholics found offensive. For example, he used *congregation* instead of *church*, *elder* instead of *priest*, *repent* instead of *do penance*, and *love* instead of *charity*. Tyndale’s English translations of these words were in many cases probably more accurate translations of the Greek terms, but they differed from the familiar Vulgate upon which much Christian theology had been based. These terms are loaded: *do penance* had sacramental implications rejected by many reformers—whereas *repent* more closely reflected an act that could be done by an individual before God, without the need of the church. And Tyndale preferred the term *love* as being more allusive to the Protestant understanding of grace and the term *charity* to be more in tune with the Catholic emphasis on works. These changes were offensive to Catholics and were heavily criticized by many,

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including Tyndale's countryman Thomas More.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly enough, the King James translators chose to retain the traditional terms *church*, *priest*, and *charity*, but nowhere does one find the word *penance* in the King James Version.

Tyndale sought to render the biblical text into plain and literal English and tried to capture the sense of each word in its original language and context. In many cases, particularly in the Old Testament, Tyndale came upon ancient words and phrases that did not have precise English counterparts. Tyndale studied the original Hebrew and/or Greek of the biblical text and then looked at the ancient translations in Greek and Latin—the Septuagint and the Vulgate—for help. He could also consult Wycliffe's translation—which was not very useful because it was written in Middle English and rendered from the Vulgate. Tyndale apparently made great use of Luther's 1522 German translation of the New Testament for its grammar, vocabulary, and theology.<sup>13</sup> In several cases, Tyndale solved translation problems by ingeniously coining new English words. Sometimes he simply transformed older English words, and sometimes he invented new and unique English words—some of which have become common vocabulary in English. Here we will look at five such newly coined terms: *Jehovah*, *Passover*, *atonement*, *scapegoat*, and *mercy seat*.

*Jehovah*. Perhaps the most significant of the “new” words that Tyndale bequeathed us is the name of God—*Jehovah*. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the proper name of God is rendered with what is called the tetragrammaton, the letters *yhwh*—which occurs, according to one count, 6,828 times.<sup>14</sup> The ancient vocalization of the four consonants of this name is not known, but scholars hypothesize that it was pronounced Yahweh. Because of the sanctity of this name within Judaism, a tradition developed to call God not by his name but by the designation *Lord*, or *Adonai* in Hebrew. At the end of the fifth century after Christ, the Masoretes (who first put the vowels in the Hebrew text) reflected this tradition by adding the vowels for the Hebrew word *Adonai* to the consonants of the tetragrammaton, thereby directing the reader to read *Adonai* rather than the name of God. The early Greek and Latin translators followed the Jewish tradition and simply rendered the tetragrammaton as Greek *kyrios* or Latin *Dominus*. In his Middle English translation, Wycliffe rendered *yhwh* as *Adonai*, and Luther translated the word into the German *HERR* (“Lord”) using capital



letters, presumably to distinguish it from the translation of the common Hebrew noun for *lord* as *Herr*.

Tyndale followed this tradition and used the English word *Lorde* throughout his translation. Apparently following Luther, he put the word into capital letters, but only in Genesis—almost always *LORde* rather than *LORDE*. Several times in scripture, however, Tyndale deemed the name of God itself to be essential to the meaning of the text. For example, Tyndale rendered Exodus 6:3 as follows (*I* and *J* were the same letter in Tyndale's day): "And God spake unto Moses saying unto him: I am the Lorde, and I appeared unto Abraham, Isaac and Iacob an allmightie God: but in my name Iehovah was I not knowne unto them." Thus Tyndale gave us the first occurrence of the word *Jehovah*—an anglicized form of the Hebrew *yhw̄h*—in English. It was formed by using the vowels of *Adonai* with the consonants *yhw̄h*, producing YaHoWaH or YaHoVaH—since the Hebrew letter *w* can be pronounced as "w" or "v." Some have given Tyndale credit for actually inventing the word *Jehovah*, but scholars have found prior attestations of this word in a Latin theological text by Petrus Galatinus dating to AD 1520, and they suspect it might go back even farther.<sup>15</sup> Whether or not a similar name already existed in Latin, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it was Tyndale who was responsible for coining this term in English. Tyndale also used *Jehovah* in titles such as *Jehovah Nissi* in Exodus 17:15 and *Jehovah Shalom* in Judges 6:24.

At the end of his translation of Genesis, Tyndale included a list explaining his translations of various Hebrew words. In these notes, he explains the name *Jehovah*: "Jehovah is goddes name, nether is any creature so called. And it is as moch to saye as one that is of himself and dependeth of nothinge. Moreouer as oft as thou seist [seest] *LORde* in great letters (excepte there be any erreure in the prentinge) it is in hebrewe *Jehovah*, thou that arte or he that is."

The King James translators followed Tyndale and his successors in using the English word *LORD*, with the "L" as a full-sized capital and the "ord" in small capital letters, to render the tetragrammaton. But in a few passages they also deemed it necessary to use the name *Jehovah*. For example, in the passage in Exodus 6:3, the King James Version follows Tyndale's rendering. The King James Version includes *Jehovah* in four other places in the Old Testament (Genesis 22:14; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4).

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Within the Restoration, the word *Jehovah* is the accepted word in English to represent Jesus Christ as the God of the Old Testament in Latter-day Saint scripture.<sup>16</sup>

*Passover.* Throughout the Old Testament, Tyndale was faced with many legal and religious Hebrew terms that were difficult to find English equivalents for. The custom among previous translators was simply to render the Hebrew word into some form of the translation language. The translation of the Hebrew names of the Old Testament festivals posed an interesting challenge for translators. The Greek and Latin translators, along with Wycliffe and Luther, simply rendered Hebrew *šabbāt* with some form of the Hebrew word: Greek, *sabbata*; Latin, *sabbata*; Wycliffe, *sabbath*; and German, *Sabbatag*. Tyndale rendered it *sabbath day*. Then there were the three Hebrew pilgrimage festivals: *Pesach*, *Shavuoth*, and *Sukkoth*. Tyndale simply translated two of these words into English: *šāvu'ōt* as “weeks” and *sukkōt*, meaning “tents” or “booths,” as “tabernacles.” However, there was not an English word for the Hebrew *pesah*. Other translators simply transliterated the Hebrew letters in their place: Greek, *pesaq*; Latin, *phase* (using a different pronunciation of the Hebrew letters) or *pasqua*; Wycliffe used *Pasch*; and Luther, *Passah*.

Tyndale noted that the noun *pesah* in Hebrew was used to refer to the sacrifice itself—the paschal lamb—as well as to the festival. In addition, he noted that in Hebrew the noun *pesah* derived from a verb *psḥ* that meant “to pass over” or “jump over”—which was important in the story of the foundation of this festival in Exodus 12, where the Lord explains that the *pesah* lamb is a type of the fact that the Lord will “jump, skip, or pass” over the children of Israel and deliver them from death (Exodus 12:13). Tyndale may also have noted that Jerome, in his Latin translation, had attempted to render this same Hebrew wordplay. He used the term *transitus Domini* (“the passing over of the Lord”) to describe the paschal sacrifice (Exodus 12:11) and the verb *transeo*, “to pass over,” as it is used in Exodus 12:13 (*ac transibo vos*, “I will pass over you”). Elsewhere, Jerome maintained *phase* or *pasqua* as the translation of Hebrew *pesah*.

Tyndale, determined to preserve the Hebrew wordplay in English, ingeniously invented the new English word *Passover* for the festival. Thus in English the festival is called *Passover*, and the verb of the Lord delivering Israel is *pass over*.<sup>17</sup> To the first biblical occurrence of the term *passover* in

gation together, committeth the keepynge of Gods flocke vnto them,  
warneth them of false teachers, maketh his prayer with them, and  
departeth to shippe.

**A**fter the rage was ceased, Paul called the disciples vnto hym, and toke his leaue of them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone ouer those parties, and geuen them large exhortations, he came into Grece, and there abode. iij. monethes. And when the Iewes layde wayte for hym as he was aboute to sayle into Syria, he purposed to returne thorow Macedonia. There accompanied him into Asia, Sopater of Berrea, and of Thessalonias, Aristarcus and Secundus, and Gaius of Derba, and Timotheus: and oute of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went before, and taried vs at Troas. And we sayled awaye from Philippi, after the dayes of twete breade, and came vnto them to Troas in fyue dayes, where we abode seuen dayes.

And vpon one of the Sabboth dayes, the disciples being come together for to <sup>a\*</sup> breake bread: Paule preached vnto them (ready to departe on the morowe) and continued the preachynge vnto mydnyght. And there were many lightes in the chaumber, where we were gathered together, and there sate in a wyndow, a certayne yonge man (named Eutichus) fallen into a depe slepe. And as Paule was preachynge, he was the more ouercome with slepe, and fel doune from the thyrde losse, and was taken vp deade. But Paule went downe and fell on hym, and embrased hym, and sayde: make nothyng a do, for his lyfe is in hym. So when he was come vp agayne, he brake bread, and dyd eate, and commened a longe whyle (euē tyl the mornynge) and so departed. And they broughte the yonge man alyue, and were not a lyttle comforted.

And we went afoze to shippe, and lowsed vnto Asson, there to receaue Paul. For so had he appoynted, and would hym selfe go a fote. When he was come vnto vs to Asson,

Tyndale New Testament, 1552, Acts 20:1–14, printed by Richard Juge, London; “And vpon one of the Sabboth dayes, the disciples being come together for to breake bread: Paule preached vnto them (ready to departe on the morowe) and continued the preachynge vnto mydnyght.”

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Exodus 12, “and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lords passover” (v. 11), Tyndale added this pithy marginal note: “The lamb was called passover that the very name itself should put them in remembrance what it signified. For the signs that God ordained either signified the benefits done, or promises to come and were not dumb as are the signs of our dumb god the Pope.”<sup>18</sup> Tyndale finishes his explanation of the Lord’s *passover*: “For I will go about in the land of Egypt. . . . I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:12–13).

Oddly enough, Tyndale did not use his newly coined word in the New Testament but preferred the term *Easter*—which Christians of his time routinely used for the Christian festival. The term *Easter*, though derived from the name of a pagan goddess of the dawn, had in Tyndale’s day become firmly attached to the Christian celebration of Passover. It is likely that by using the term by which all Christians who spoke English knew the Christian celebration of the Passover/Resurrection, Tyndale was attempting to communicate that the old festival of the law of Moses—Passover—had been fulfilled in Christ. Thus in the Gospels Tyndale used *Easter* for the Last Supper (Matthew 26; see also Mark 14; Luke 22) and referenced the *Easter lamb* in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and Hebrews 11:28. Tyndale would likely have been amused that the King James translators would use his word *Passover* in all these Gospel passages, as well as throughout the Old Testament, using *Easter* only in Acts 12:4. The Romance languages French (*Pâques*), Italian (*Pasqua*), and Spanish (*Pascua*) all adopted a form of the original Hebrew—probably from the Vulgate—and in these countries the festival is known by a variation of its original Hebrew name *pesah*. The term *Easter* prevailed among English-speaking Christians in reference to the Christian festival. But the Jewish festival, throughout the Bible and throughout Christian and Jewish discourse (in Christian Bible dictionaries and even in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*), is everywhere called by Tyndale’s ingenious word *Passover*.

*Atonement*. Tyndale’s first use of the English word *atonement* is in his 1526 translation of the New Testament at Romans 5:11: “We also joy in God by the means of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement.” In addition to the noun *atonement* (Greek *katallagē*), two forms of the related Greek verb, *katallassō*, occur in Romans 5:10, which Tyndale translated as “we were reconciled” and “seeing we were reconciled.” The words in this passage in Classical Greek mean “to change from enmity to

friendship,” or “to reconcile.” In the New Testament, the verb is used in one passage describing the reconciliation of one human with another (1 Corinthians 7:11), but it most often describes the reconciliation of humans with God (Romans 5:10–11; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Colossians 1:20, 22; Ephesians 2:16). It is this Greek word that Tyndale translates with the word *atonement*, and it is likely that this Greek word provides the foundation for his understanding of the effects of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

While many have stated that Tyndale invented this word, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists several variations and combinations of *at* and *one*, such as “to one,” “at one,” “one ment” (used by Wycliffe), and “atonement,” that were used in Tyndale’s time. But Tyndale saw that this term was a very good match for the theological context of the relationship between God and man and put the word *atonement* into his passages in the Old and New Testaments.

Tyndale only used the word *atonement* twice more in his New Testament, in the very important passage describing the effects of Christ’s Atonement in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. The nominal and verbal forms of the Greek root *katallassō* occur five times in this passage, two of which Tyndale renders with “atonement” and one with “at one with.” A brief review of these five occurrences can help us see how he understood the meaning of the Greek word in relationship to the effect of Christ’s atonement. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, Tyndale renders “which hath reconciled” and “the office to preach the atonement.” In 5:19, he translates “and made agreement” and “the preaching of the atonement.” In 5:20 he renders “that ye may be at one with God.”

The Geneva and King James translators only used the English word *atonement* once in the New Testament, at Romans 5:11. Throughout the passages in Romans 5:10–11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, the Geneva Bible and the KJV uniformly translated the words derived from *katallassō* with variations of the word *reconcile* or *reconciliation*. The word *reconciliation* was not uncommon and was employed by Tyndale and the Geneva translators, but Tyndale often found simple English words to express the concept.

Tyndale’s “which hath *reconciled* us unto himself by Jesus Christ” is similarly rendered by the KJV as “who hath *reconciled* us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18). But Tyndale’s “the office to preach the *atonement*” is “ministry of *reconciliation*” in the KJV (2 Corinthians 5:18).



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Tyndale's "For God was in Christ, and *made agreement* between the world and himself" is "To wit, that God was in Christ, *reconciling* the world unto himself" in the KJV (2 Corinthians 5:19). Tyndale's "the preaching of the *atonement*" is rendered in the KJV with "the word of *reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:19), and his "*Be at one with God*" in the KJV is "*Be ye reconciled to God*" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Several words in the Old Testament are also relevant to the language of Atonement in the Bible. Leviticus 16 contains a description of the most solemn of the festivals of the law of Moses, called *Yom Kippur* in Hebrew.<sup>19</sup> Tyndale coined three new English words in conjunction with this festival, which he called the Day of Atonement: *atonement*, *scapegoat*, and *mercy seat*. The Hebrew root behind *Kippur* is *kpr*, which has the sense of "to cover up" and occurs in contexts where it means "to appease, make amends, or reconcile."<sup>20</sup> Leviticus 16 contains many occurrences of this word in a verbal form describing the rituals of reconciliation between God and man. Tyndale translated this Hebrew verb as "to make atonement" (Leviticus 16:6, 10) or "to reconcile" (Leviticus 16:6, 18, 20). The Septuagint translates this Hebrew word meaning "reconciliation" with various Greek words, including *exilaskomai* and *hilastērion*, which both mean "to reconcile" or "make amends." The Vulgate uses *expiationum*, which has the sense of satisfying or appeasing. The King James translators used Tyndale's words *atonement*, *scapegoat*, and *mercy seat* in their translation of the Old Testament.

While some of the Greek terms in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 16 associated with the Day of Atonement are found in the New Testament, neither Tyndale nor the King James translators used the term *atonement* to translate them. Nevertheless, a look at two of these terms can help us see how they understood the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament as a type and shadow of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The Greek word *hilastērion*, which in Classical Greek refers to a gift or sacrifice to appease or gain the favor of a deity, is used to translate the Hebrew *kappōret*, which describes the golden cover of the ark of the covenant as the place where amends are made for sins on the Day of Atonement. This word is found in Romans 3:24–25. Tyndale used common vocabulary to translate the passage, relying on his understanding of the connection of the *hilastērion* as the mercy seat with "Christ Jesus, whom God hath *made a seat of mercy* through faith in his blood." The King



James translators, on the other hand, render “Christ Jesus: Whom God hath *set forth to be a propitiation* through faith in his blood.” They choose to translate *hilastērion* (Tyndale “mercy seat”) with *propitiation*, taken from the Vulgate, which remains obscure today.<sup>21</sup> In related passages with the Greek term *hilasmos* (cognate of *hilastērion*), used to refer to the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:9), Tyndale also had common vocabulary: “He it is *that obtaineth grace* for our sins” (KJV, “he is *the propitiation* for our sins,” 1 John 2:2), and “sent his son to *make agreement* for our sins” (KJV, “sent his Son to *be the propitiation* for our sins,” 1 John 4:10).

The word *propitiation* does not appear at all in modern revelation. *Reconcile* appears in several passages, but Tyndale’s word *atonement*, with its variations *atone*, *atoned*, *atoneth*, and *atoning*, is found over forty times in modern scripture, especially in the Book of Mormon. As one of the many lasting legacies of Tyndale to the Latter-day Saint faith, *atonement* has become our common designation for the saving acts of Jesus Christ on behalf of the children of men and for the possibility of reconciliation and “at-one-ment” through his sacrifice.

*Scapegoat.* Leviticus 16 describes the ritual of the Day of Atonement, in which two goats are selected—one for sacrifice and the other to set the sins on and be sent out into the wilderness. The Hebrew word for this second goat is *Azazel*, a word that only occurs in this context in the Hebrew Bible. The early Greek and Latin translators presumed, probably incorrectly, that this word was made up of Hebrew ‘ēz ‘ōzēl, meaning “a goat that goes away” (in Greek, *chimaros apopompaïos*, “to be sent away,” and in Latin, *caper emissarius*). Tyndale followed the Greek and Latin and invented a new English term for this entity. He placed the English word *scape*, a variant of *escape*, together with *goat* to get *scapegoat*. (Tyndale used *scape* in Matthew 15:18: “One tyle of the lawe shall not scape tyll all be fulfilled” [1526].)

Biblical scholars now believe that the term *Azazel* is most likely a proper name of a demon of some sort, and thus modern English translations usually render the term as *Azazel*. The term invented by Tyndale, however, is still accurate as a description of this goat that would be sent out to the wilderness bearing all of the sins of Israel, and the concept of the scapegoat has become a common proverbial expression in English.

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*Mercy seat.* In the book of Exodus, the Lord commanded the children of Israel to construct the ark of the covenant. On the top of this ark was a covering of pure gold—in Hebrew called the *kappōret*—cognate with *kip̄pūr*, rendered “atonement” (as discussed above). The Greek term used is *hilastērion*, and the Latin term is *propitiatorium*. Both terms refer to the function of the covering on the holy Day of Atonement when the high priest would come into the holy of holies and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the cover. In his 1526 New Testament, Tyndale rendered this term as “the seate of grace” in Hebrews 9:5, but in his translation of the Old Testament, most likely influenced by Luther’s *Gnadenstuhle* (literally “grace” or “mercy” with “chair” or “seat”), Tyndale coined the term “merci-seate” (Exodus 25:17, 18). While Tyndale kept “seat of grace” in his 1534 New Testament, the King James translators used the term “mercy seat” throughout the Old and the New Testaments. The term “mercy seat” nicely links the idea of atonement implied by the Hebrew word *kappōret*, as it is linguistically linked with the host of terms dealing with repentance and forgiveness and the reconciliation offered to ancient Israel at this sacred covering. Thus it became a common term in religious discourse. Modern translations often opt for less interpretative words. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) keeps “mercy seat,” while the New International Version (NIV) translates “atonement cover,” and the New Jewish Publication Society Translation (NJPS) simply renders “cover.”

### “COME . . . UNTO THE WORDES OF HEALTH, AND OF ETERNALL LYFE”

The terms *Jehovah*, *Passover*, *atonement*, *scapegoat*, and *mercy seat* were taken from Tyndale by the King James translators of the Old Testament and have become common in modern English. The word *Jehovah* is often used by Christians in reference to the God of the Old Testament; the words *Passover* and *atonement* are used by Jews and Christians in reference to the biblical and Jewish festivals of Passover and the Day of Atonement; and the word *scapegoat* has become a common term in English referring to one who is forced to bear the guilt of others.

In addition, all five of these terms are commonly used by Latter-day Saints. Several of these words are found in Restoration scripture. For example, the word *Jehovah* is the accepted rendering of the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon, in the Doctrine and Covenants, in the Pearl of Great Price, and throughout Latter-day Saint religious discussion. Likewise, the noun *atonement* and the verbs *atone*, *atoneth*, and *atoning* occur many times throughout the Book of Mormon and a few times in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price when describing the redemptive sacrifice of the Savior. The word *atonement* is prominent in the third article of faith: “We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind will be saved.” The English word *atonement* is regularly used in explaining the nature of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice and its ability to heal, make whole, and reconcile the broken relationship between God and humans caused by the Fall and by our sins. And who can imagine singing the hymn “I Stand All Amazed,” without the image of presenting oneself at the “mercy seat”?<sup>22</sup>

Tyndale realized that he was breaking new ground. In a touching introduction to his 1526 New Testament, he wrote, “Them that are learned Christenly, I beseche: for as moche as I am sure, and my conscience beareth me recorde, that of a pure entent, singilly and faythfully I have interpreted itt, as farre forth as god gave me the gyfte of knowledge, and underston-dynge: that the rudnes off the worke nowe at the fyrst tyme, offende them not: but that they consyder howe that I had no man to counterfet, nether was holpe with englysshe of eny that had intetpreted the same, or soche lyke thinge in the scripture before tyme.”<sup>23</sup>

Tyndale’s translation was carefully constructed with words “fitly spoken” (Proverbs 25:11). Throughout the ages, his words, both in his translation and as they are preserved in the King James Bible, have brought and continue to bring many to Christ. Indeed, in his own words directed to the readers of his translation, he invites us as follows: “Geve diligence Reder (I exhorte the) that thou come with a pure mynde, and as the scripture sayth with a syngle eye, unto the wordes of health, and of eternall lyfe: by the which (if we repent and beleve them) we are borne anewe, created afresshe, and enjoye the frutes off the bloud of Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

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### NOTES

1. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, as cited in David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 142 (ref. 805 note 26).
2. For a succinct and readable review of English translations of the Bible before 1611, see Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 271–304.
3. See Tyndale's introduction to the New Testament in *The New Testament Translated by William Tyndale, the Text of the Worms Edition of 1526 in Original Spelling*, ed. W. R. Cooper (London: The British Library, 2000), 554.
4. The translations of Tyndale are readily available for the modern reader in three editions: *Tyndale's Old Testament, Being the Pentateuch of 1530, Joshua to 2 Chronicles of 1537, and Jonah*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); *Tyndale's New Testament, Translated from the Greek by William Tyndale in 1534* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); William Tyndale, trans., *New Testament, Edition of 1526 in Original Spelling*.
5. As cited in Daniell, *Bible in English*, 156.
6. See Jon Nielson and Royal Skousen, "How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale's?," *Reformation* 3 (1998): 49–74.
7. As cited in Alister E. McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 33.
8. Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, and German. See Daniell, *Bible in English*, 142.
9. Tyndale, *The Obedyence of a Christian Man* (Antwerp: Hans Luft, 1528), xiii.
10. Gerald Hammond has noted: "Tyndale's claim for the superiority of English over Latin is, in essence, a matter of comparative syntax, and, broadly speaking, Tyndale is right. The only major variation between Hebrew and English word order is that in Hebrew the verb normally precedes the subject—as in 'and said Moses'—and that the adjective often follows the noun. In all other respects, in particular the use of and disposition of qualifying clauses, the sixteenth-century translators followed Tyndale's lead in letting their renderings be governed by the syntax of the original. The result was the fluid and rhythmical prose which marks the narrative and prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible." Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982), 45.
11. Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 104–5.
12. The significance of Tyndale's translation in the Reformation can be measured by the vigorous opposition mounted against him by the Catholic Church. Thomas More, the Catholic humanist and defender of the faith, criticized Tyndale's translation and theology extensively in *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*—to which Tyndale responded and defended himself in *An Answer unto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue of 1531*—and

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- in the massive *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, a work that totaled almost two thousand pages (see Daniell, *Bible in English*, 149).
13. See Gerald Hammond, "William Tyndale's Pentateuch: Its Relation to Luther's German Bible and the Hebrew Original," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (1980): 351–85.
  14. See Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:524.
  15. Catholic scholars have traced a Latin form of *Jehovah* back to the thirteenth century. See A. J. Maus, "Jehovah," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. (New York: Robert Appleton, 1909), 8:329–31.
  16. See 2 Nephi 22:2; Moroni 10:34; D&C 109:34, 42, 56, 68; 110:3; 128:9; Abraham 1:16.
  17. I will present most quotations from Tyndale's translations in modern spelling.
  18. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, 105.
  19. Yom Kippur is the common Jewish designation of the festival. The biblical name for this festival is *yôm hakkippûrîm* (Leviticus 23:27; 25:9), but this designation does not occur in the description of the festival itself in Leviticus 16.
  20. William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 163. Scholars debate the origin of the root *kpr*. Cognates in other Semitic language seem to be from two different roots, one meaning "to uproot, wipe away" and the other meaning "to cover, hide."
  21. The Bishops' Bible has "propitiation" at Romans 3:25 but "atonement" at 1 John 2:2 and "agreement" at 1 John 4:10.
  22. Charles H. Gabriel, "I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 193.
  23. Tyndale, "To the Reder," *New Testament, Edition of 1526 in Original Spelling*, 554.
  24. Tyndale, "To the Reder," *New Testament, Edition of 1526 in Original Spelling*, 553.