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Question 84 - What are the facts regarding the Great Bible?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

84. What are the facts regarding the Great Bible?

A. The notes and preface of Tyndale's translation aroused so much argument that Henry VIII authorized a new version that would include no controversial footnote material. It was called the Great Bible because of its size. Due to its extreme value it was usually chained to a "reading post" within a church. In 1538 the king issued an injunction to all churches to purchase a copy of the Great Bible. This was to be paid for by the parson and parishioners. The importance of the Great Bible is that it became the first official English Bible "appointed to be read in all the churches." The King James Bible is basically a revision of the Great Bible. It was translated by Miles Coverdale in 1539 and remained the English Bible for 20 years.

B. It was called the Great Bible because of its massive size, the pages measuring 16½ by 11 inches. Seven editions were published. It is also sometimes called the Chained Bible because copies were chained to the reading desks.

Based as it was on the Matthew Bible, which in turn had been based on Tyndale, this stands as Tyndale's memorial. The Great Bible remained the English Bible for twenty years. Tyndale had burned to ashes in a foreign land, but the Great Bible was in every respect the fruit of his labor and the memorial of his life. Within two years, 20,000 copies had been sold.

C. The clergy were ordered to place a copy in a convenient place in every church. So popular did the reading of these Bibles by the public become that the king had to issue a proclamation forbidding the reading of the English Bible aloud during divine service. Some parishioners evidently found the reading of the Bible in their mother tongue more interesting than listening to the parson. From the complaints registered by bishops that people read the Bible during the sermon, it is clear that the king's command was not always taken seriously.

(A General Introduction to the Bible. David Ewert. Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983. p. 193)