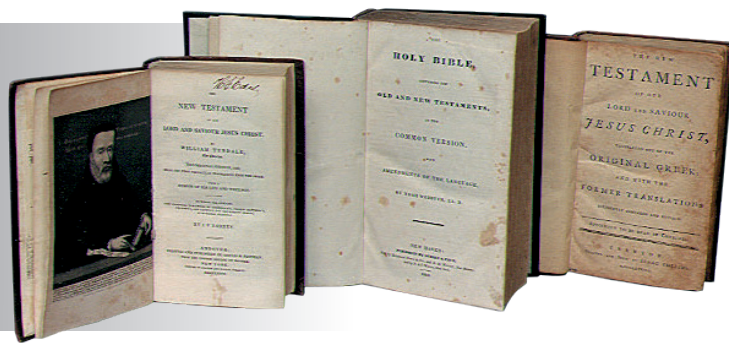


Dunham Bible Museum NEWS



Houston Christian University

Spring 2025

Volume 22 Issue 2

The Gospels in Nyanja

The Dunham Bible Museum's most recent acquisition is a manuscript of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in Nyanja, a Bantu language spoken in Malawi. The manuscript is missionary Robert Laws' translation of the gospels prepared for the printer in 1885. The text is beautifully written in cursive and is divided into chapters and verses.

Missionary Dr. Robert Laws (1851-1934) was a

Scottish missionary in Nyasaland, modern Malawi, for over fifty years. He was part of the original committee in 1875 which organized the Livingstonia Mission, named in memory of missionary David Livingston. Laws was in charge of the mission from 1877-1929. The mission established numerous schools throughout the region, and Laws regularly relied on the students for guidance in using particular words and phrases in his Bible translation. When a portion of the translation was completed, it was used in public worship. Those attending were encouraged to note any mistakes in the translation and offer suggestions for improvement.

As a medical doctor, Robert Laws provided medical care for the natives as well as missionaries, many who would travel long distances to benefit from his skills. By the time Laws left Africa in 1927, Livingstonia had over 700 primary schools. The secondary schools taught Christian theology, industrial and agricultural subjects, and medicine. There were thirteen ordained native pastors, and over 60,000 Christians.

Of all Laws' numerous accomplishments in Livingstonia, the most important was undoubtedly his translation of the Scriptures, the Word of God, into Nyanja – a copy of which is now in the Dunham Bible Museum, in Robert Laws' own hand (*see page 2*).

English Words First Used in Bible Translations

The first recorded use of many of the words used in ordinary English today can be found in the early translations of the Bible into English. When John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English from Jerome's Latin Vulgate in the fourteenth century, he enlarged the English language by adapting many Latin words into his English Bible. The



*Ordination of the first three pastors in Livingstonia.
The pastors are seated, with three missionaries standing,
Robert Laws is on the right.*

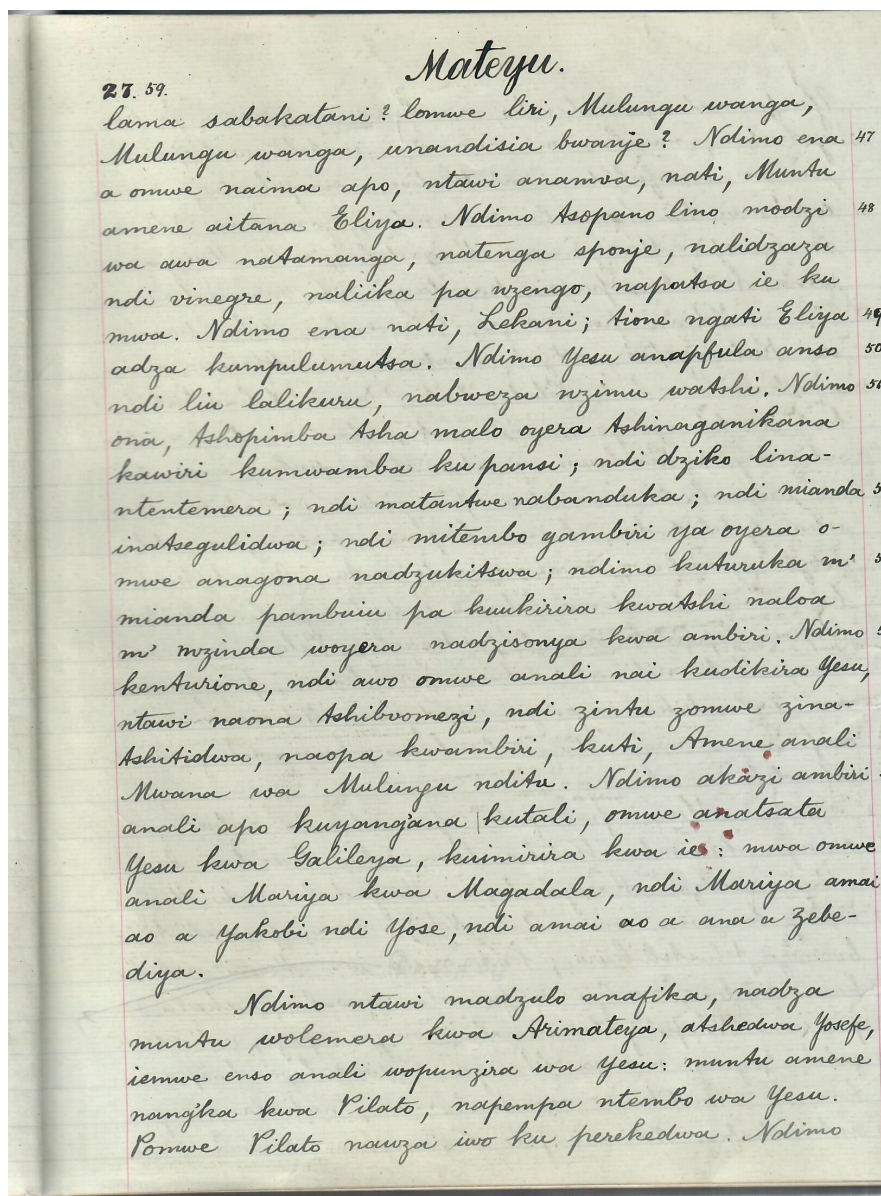
continued on page 2

The Gospels in Nyanja, continued

words *treasure* and *mystery*, *glory* and *horror*, *female* and *sex* all owe their English usage to Wycliffe's Bible. William Tyndale, translating from the Hebrew and Greek in the 16th century, did not borrow as much from the Latin as did Wycliffe. He did coin words from the Dutch and Germanic sources (after all, he did his translation work while in those two countries) as well as French. *Beautiful* and *ungodly* were such words. Many of Tyndale's coined words were compound words, such as *fisherman*, *castaway*, and *busybody*. Both Wycliffe's and Tyndale's translations included phrases which readily entered the language with their Bible translations – phrases like *a city on a hill*, *my brother's keeper*, *ye of little faith*, *salt of the earth*, and *thirty pieces of silver*.

Tyndale's 1530 translation of the Pentateuch (the 5 books written by Moses) into English was the first to use the name "Jehovah" as God's divine name (Then it was spelled "Iehouah", since *J* and *V* had not yet taken their place in the English alphabet.).

The section of the Bible Museum's website "English Words/Phrases from Early English Translations" has more about the Bible translations' influence on our English language.



Jerome (c. 342-420) on the Importance of the Scripture

"To ignore the Scripture is to ignore Christ, (I Corinthians 3:11)...If there is anything which sustains the wise man in times of strife and amid disasters and upheavals in the world, anything which helps him to remain steadfast in serenity of mind, it is in the first place, I consider meditation on the Scriptures and knowledge of them. ...From the Scriptures, he who is assailed and oppressed by adversity and misfortune will draw comfort and superhuman strength to suffer and to endure with patience. In them, in the Holy Gospels, Christ is held up before all mankind as the Supreme and perfect Model of justice, charity and mercy. In them, for the benefit of humanity in its anguish and terror, there are opened fountains of divine grace which nations and their rulers may not neglect or disregard without loss of the power to aim at or consolidate national tranquility or a national unity of thought. Finally, in them all men will learn to know Christ who is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:10) and who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption. (I Corinthians 1:30)"

~ from Jerome's prologues to Isaiah and Ephesians

500th Anniversary of Tyndale's New Testament

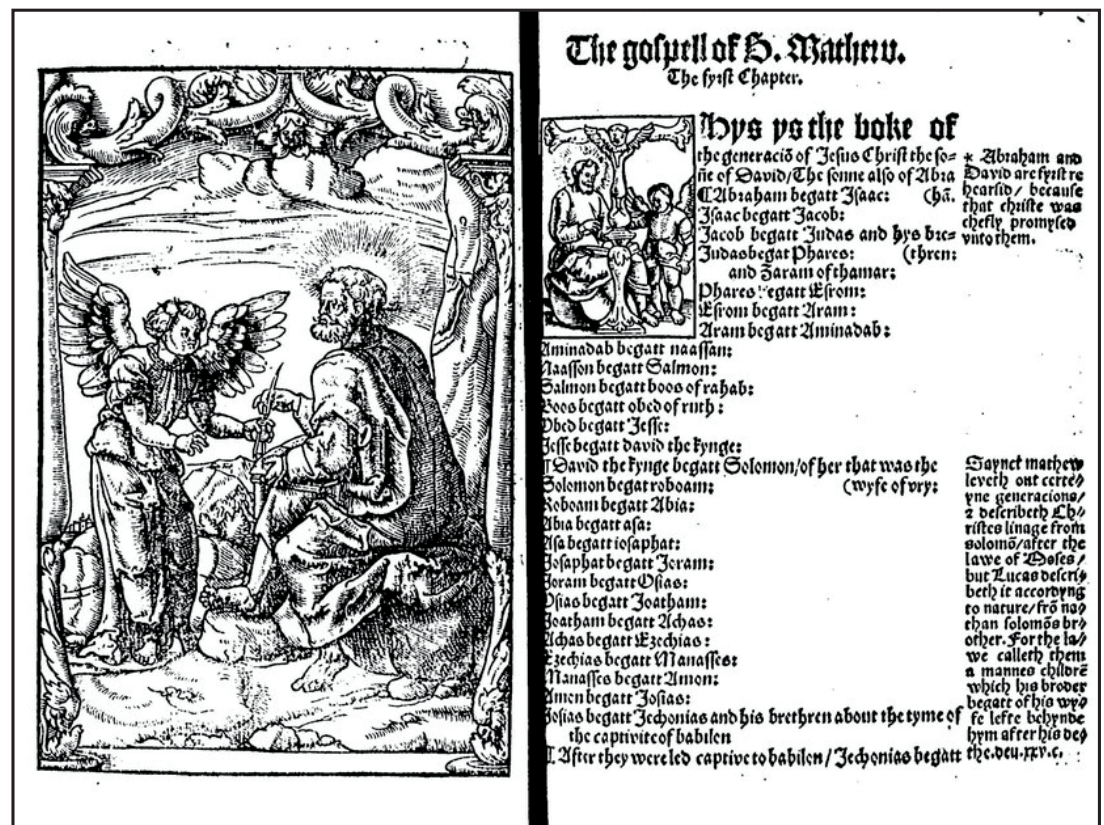
In the 1450's, Johann Gutenberg printed the first book on a printing press with moveable metal type – a Latin Vulgate Bible. The first Bible printed in a vernacular language was printed in Germany in 1466. There were several printings of the Bible in German before Martin Luther's influential translation was printed in 1522. The first French New Testament was printed in 1476, with the complete Bible printed in 1488. A Bible translated from the Latin was printed in Italy in 1471; an Italian translation from Erasmus' Greek text was printed in 1530. A Dutch Bible was printed in 1477; a Bible in Catalan was printed in Spain in 1478, and a Danish New Testament was printed in 1524. What about English?

English was among the last vernacular Bible translations to be printed. After John Wycliffe had translated the Bible into English in the 14th century, in 1407, the Constitutions of Oxford restricted Wycliffe's writings and any vernacular translation of the Scripture. Under these rules, there would be no printing of English Bibles in England.

William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536), a gifted scholar and linguist, was chaplain and tutor in the home of Sir John Walsh in Gloucestershire. In 1522, when he obtained a copy of Martin Luther's German New Testament, Tyndale saw the need for the New Testament in English and began working on a translation, using Erasmus' printed Greek text. In 1523, he went to London seeking the support of Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall, a friend of Erasmus. When Tunstall declined to support Tyndale's work, Tyndale stayed for a time with Humphry Monmouth, a London cloth merchant, and continued to work on his New Testament translation.

In 1524, when it became obvious an English translation of Scripture was forbidden in England Tyndale left London and went to Europe. There he completed his New Testament translation. He took the translation to printer Peter Quintel in Cologne. While the work was being printed, in 1525, anti-Lutheran authorities forced the printing to stop, with only the gospel of Matthew through chapter 22 printed. Tyndale was able to personally escape the authorities and take away some of the printed pages. He then went to Worms, where the first complete New Testament in English was printed in 1526.

The British Library holds the only remaining copy of the 1525 printing; a facsimile is in the Dunham Bible Museum. This Cologne Fragment contains words which continue in our English translations today: "ask and it shall be given you: Seek and you shall find: "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7:7); "Enter in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction." (7:13).



*Opening of the Gospel of Matthew in Tyndale's 1525 New Testament
Cologne Fragment, in British Museum*



Houston Christian University
7502 Fondren Road
Houston, TX 77074-3298
281-649-3287
dseverance@hc.edu

NonProfit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Kansas City, MO
PERMIT #1996

“The whole inspiration of our civilization springs from the teachings of Christ and the lessons of the prophets. To read the Bible for these fundamentals is a necessity of American life.”

*Herbert C. Hoover,
31st president of
the United States*

Current Special Exhibits

- ♣ Celebrating the life of Jesus, the Christ: Three Centuries of Bible Art
- ♣ The Treasured Word
- ♣ Out of this World – the Bible on the Moon

The Dunham Bible Museum's regular exhibits include:

- Bible manuscripts
 - American Bibles
 - Early printed Bibles
 - *The St. John's Bible*
 - English bibles
 - Foreign Bible translations
- ...all designed to show the Bible's history, influence, and impact.

The Dunham Bible Museum is OPEN 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Monday – Saturdays, except University holidays.

To make an appointment for group tours, or for further information, contact Dr. Diana Severance at 281-649-3287 or dseverance@hc.edu



Visit our website at www.hc.edu/biblemuseum
There you will find virtual tours of the Museum's exhibits, past and present, as well as videos of past lectures and much more.

The Dunham Bible Museum is open 10-4, Monday-Saturdays, except University holidays. Admission is free. To make an appointment for group tours, or for further information, contact Dr. Diana Severance at 281-649-3287 or dseverance@hc.edu.



Our Facebook page was hacked, but we have a new page – HCU Dunham Bible Museum. Please visit us and like us!

Become a Friend

The Dunham Bible Museum Friends support the programs and collections of the Museum through annual contributions and participation in Museum events. Friends have the satisfaction that their tax deductible gift will benefit the Dunham Bible Museum, enabling it to achieve its goal of being a premier museum dedicated to the Bible, its message, history, and influence. All Friends will receive year-long benefits of a printed subscription to the Dunham Bible Museum News, invitations to exhibit openings, and a discount on Museum store purchases. Visit the Museum's website (hc.edu/biblemuseum) for the membership form.

On your next Dunham Bible Museum visit, try out our audio tour using your cell phone!