

The HOLY BIBLE : Origin & Growth

This document, accompanied with the diagram, displays the gradual development of the Holy Bible (with emphasis on the English translation), starting with its origin, the original manuscripts. The Holy Bible was developed into numerous versions; Each version being founded directly or indirectly upon the original manuscripts.

Today, we are living in the age of the “Information Super Highway” and yesterday we were living in the age of the “Printing Press.” What a colossal transition in comparison to the age of the scribes or “professional copyist of manuscripts and documents.”

With this enormous leap of technology, it is difficult for us to realize that the books of the Bible were originally written without the aide of modern technology: word processors, mass printing, storage devices, etc. Thus, each copy of the Holy Writ had to be made slowly and exhaustingly by a scribe. Under these circumstances, many ancient books were lost. This largely accounts for the fact that all the original manuscripts of the Word of God have perished. With this knowledge, one might ask, "What have we then as a faithful foundation of our Bible?"

As our foundation, we have the two principle sources. The first source has been known as the *most ancient copies* (of the *original manuscripts*). These *most ancient copies* have three principle codices: Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus. (Listed below as A, B, and C.) Along with these, we have the *ancient copies* which exist as a result of scribes duplicating the *most ancient copies*.

Along with these copies (*most ancient and ancient*) of the *original manuscripts*, we have the second source of our foundation, known as the *ancient versions*. (Listed below as D, E, F, and G.)

(While the *most ancient copies* occurred before the *ancient copies*, they co-existed with the *ancient versions*, as noted with the indicated dates. See the timeline, if available.)

- (A) **The Codex Sinaiticus**, a manuscript of the Greek Bible belonging to the 4th or 5th Century. Many professionals have dated the origin of this document to be between 340-450 A.D. Presently, it resides in the British Museum after being purchased from the Soviet Republic of Russia in 1933 by Great Britain.
- (B) **The Codex Alexandrinus**, contains the whole Greek Bible with exception of forty lost leaves. Presently, it resides in the British Museum. Estimated writing: 5th Century (400-499 A.D.).
- (C) **The Codex Vaticanus**, originally contained the whole Bible, but parts are lost. Presently, it resides in the Vatican Library at Rome. Estimated writing: 4th Century (300-399 A.D.).
- (D) **The Septuagint Version:** The translation of the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures into Greek. This version was made at Alexandria about 285-247 B.C.
- (E) **The Samaritan Pentateuch:** The Hebrew scriptures preserved in Samaritan characters. (Date unknown.)
- (F) **Peshito or Syriac:** A translation of the whole Bible into the common language of certain Syrian regions. (Date uncertain. Possibly 1st or 2nd Century.)
- (G) **The Vulgate:** The entire Bible translated into the Latin language, by Jerome at Bethlehem about 400-404 A.D. For approximately a thousand years, this was the standard Bible in the Catholic Church.

During the Dark Ages (about 400 A.D. to 1400 A.D.) very little Bible translation was attempted. There were a few minor translations made of portions of the Bible. Most this time period, the Word of God was locked up in the Latin tongue which was unknown to the common people. The following are noteworthy English translations of the Holy Bible.

John Wycliffe (1320-1384), a great English scholar and Bible student who conceived a plan of translating the whole Bible into common English. He first translated the New Testament about 1380. While working on the translation of the Old Testament, Wycliffe died. His colleagues finished the work. His translations rests upon the Latin Vulgate.

In delivering the Word of God to the common people, Wycliffe suffered much persecution. Today, he is marked as a “heretic” in the general public’s reference documents. What great cost, this book!

William Tyndale (1490-1536), was the next in order of the English translators. He was a courageous reformer, eager for the English common people to have the Bible in their own tongue.

Persecution made it difficult to remain in one place; Tyndale was always moving. In 1525, he published his English New Testament (Revised in 1534). Shortly thereafter, he was betrayed by a friend and thrust into prison at Vilvorde, near Brussels. Here, he translated the first five books of the Old Testament (The Pentateuch). Tyndale was unable to translate all of the Old Testament because of his martyrdom. On Oct. 6, 1536, he was burned at the stake. What great cost, this book!

Miles Coverdale (1488-1568), a friend of Tyndale, prepared and published a Bible dedicated to Henry VIII in 1535. Coverdale’s Bible was largely based on the previous work of Tyndale. Along with Tyndale’s work, he used Latin and German versions to complete his work.

Matthews’ Bible (1537): About the time a second edition of the Coverdale Bible was being made, another translation appeared. Its authorship is somewhat uncertain. It bears the name of Matthews, but it is generally credited to John Rogers, a companion of Tyndale.

The Great Bible (1539): The first edition of this translation was prepared by Miles Coverdale and was ordered to be set up in every parish church. It was a large-sized book, chained to the reading desk in the churches. The common people would flock to the church to hear the reading of the Word of God.

The Geneva Bible (1560): In 1553, Queen Mary (Mary Tudor) came to the throne of England after her brother's death. As Queen of England, she restored Roman Catholicism and began to suppress Protestantism. Her persecution soon earned her the nickname, "Bloody Mary."

This translation was made in Geneva by scholars who fled from England's persecution. It was a revision of the Great Bible, coupled with other English translations. *Fun Fact:* This was the Bible that Shakespeare knew and quoted.

The Bishop's Bible (1568): A revision of the Great Bible, somewhat dependant upon the Geneva Bible. It was prepared under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. It was chiefly used among clergy, and was not popular with the common people.

The Douay Bible (1582/1609-10): A Roman Catholic version made directly from the Vulgate. The New Testament published at Rheims, 1582. The Old Testament was published at Douay, 1609-10.

This translation contains controversial notes. It is the generally accepted English version of the Roman Church.

The King James Version or Authorized Version (1611): As mentioned above, the Bishop's Bible was often used by clergy in the church services. Outside the scripture readings in the church, the common people did not frequent the Bishop's Bible. They chose to read other translations, such as the Geneva Bible. To assist in the remedy of this event, Puritan John Reynolds suggested to King James I at the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 that there should be a new authoritative translation. King James agreed, and appointed "certain learned men" as translators.

History conflicts somewhat in the actual number of translators. Some references record forty-seven, while other references record fifty-four translators. These translators relied on the Bishop's Bible as their basis. With the view of obtaining the best results, the Hebrew and Greek texts, as well as other English translations (Geneva, Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthews, and the Great Bible) were researched for this new translation.

The translators were formed into six "companies" working at Westminster, Cambridge, and Oxford; each "company" took a part of the Bible and produced a draft that each translator agreed upon. A committee of twelve translators acted as editors of these drafts.

The King James Bible appeared in 1611, after two years and nine months of translating and then nine more months of preparation for the printing press. The translators had, as they said themselves in their preface, made a good translation better, "or out of many good ones one principal good one...." They had set the crown on the tradition started by Tyndale.

For almost 400 years the King James Version has had a sort of official status among English-speaking Protestants. In England it is known as the authorized Version, although no formal act of authorization was ever passed by Crown or Parliament. Yet there is no doubt that the Authorized Version became the Bible of the Church of England and of the dissenting bodies that split off from it in the 17th and 18th centuries, and it has had much the same kind of status in the Protestant denominations of the United States.

The Revised Version (1881-1884): This version was made by a company of English and American scholars.

The American Standard Version (1900-1901): This version incorporates into the text of the Bible, the readings preferred by the American members of the Revision Committee of 1881-5.

Acknowledgements:

- (1) Thompson's Original and Complete System of Bible Study, Frank Charles Thompson, 1964.
- (2) Collier's Encyclopedia, 1998
- (3) Webster's New International Dictionary, 1958.