

The Bible

The Translators of The Bible Into English

Introduction

This paper is a summarization of those noble saints, many who were “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10) in translating the Scriptures into English.

They were godly men who spent many tedious hours, oftentimes with quill and ink, diligently seeking the best word for the significance of that which was in the material available to them. It was not easy work for they did not have computers and the many tools we have today, neither did they have brightly lit rooms but oftentimes worked in low light situations in the evenings. It was in many ways a thankless task by the leading religious authorities. They certainly did not do it for monetary gain, rather, there were times when they lost their employment because of it, and some were put to death. Neither was it for the egotistical glorification of their own name being associated with it, indeed John Rogers did not use his own name. That which drove such men was the desire for the glorification of God through the common people having the Holy Scriptures in their own language.

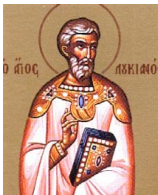
The ancient scriptures were written in three languages. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew with a few passages in Aramaic. The New Testament was written principally in Greek with some words of the Lord in Aramaic.



Marcion of Sinope was perhaps the earliest of Gnostic teachings in that he believed and taught that Jesus was the Saviour but not the God of Israel. He rejected the entire Hebrew scriptures. Therefore, he rejected all the prophecies of Christ's coming, as well as the Infancy account, and the Lord's baptism. He did include ten of Paul's epistles and if the Muratonian canon is correct, he included a Marcionite pseudo-Paul's epistle to the Alexandrian's, and a letter to the Laodiceans. This was the first false New Testament, and was strongly rejected, and indeed prompted the Christians to determine that which was genuine. This translation is understood to be between 140 and 150.



Origen was brought up in a Christian home and his father was a martyr. In 240 Origen compiled the Hexapla which was a six columned parallel of the Greek and Hebrew texts.



Lucian of Antioch was a man known for his piety and while Maximinus ruled, there was dreadful persecution. This man of God was arrested, and during his imprisonment endured much in the way of torturing. He believed in the importance of textual accuracy, taking responsibility to revise the Septuagint based on the original Hebrew, and the resulting manuscript was popular in Syria and Asia Minor. Having translated the Septuagint into Greek somewhere around 305-310, his New Testament became the foundation for Textus Receptus. Note that these all came before Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.



It was in 367 that Athanasius first identified the complete twenty-seven books of the New Testament, the chief defender of the trinity against the doctrine of Arianism.

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When Greek started to die out in western Europe, Pope Damasus ordered Jerome, who was a Catholic priest, historian, and theologian, to translate and correct the Greek version available into Latin, which was then the language of the people. Jerome translated the Hebrew scriptures, which included thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, the twenty-seven books of the old Testament, and the fourteen books of the Apocrypha. This work began in 382 and that translation is known as the “Vulgate” or “Latin Vulgate”, with the word “vulgate” simply meaning common.



Jerome

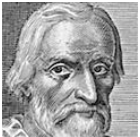
When the third Synod of Carthage gathered in 397 they approved the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

By 500 the scriptures had been translated into multiple languages (such became very valuable when determining accuracy of manuscripts). These were at least the following, Egyptian version (Codex Alexandrinus); an Ethiopic translation; a Gothic version (Codex Argenteus); and an Armenian version.

The Roman Catholic church decided in the year 600 to declare that Latin was the only language to be used for the Bible.



Caedmon was an English monk and poet who put Bible books and stories into poetry and song in the Anglo-Saxon language. He provided a paraphrase of Genesis called, “The Song of Creation” in 675-680. In less than the next one hundred years the Psalms and a portion of the gospels had been translated.



When Bede was dying, that man of God was still working and completed his translation of the gospels in to Anglo Saxon in 735.



Book of Kells, now in Dublin, Ireland was produced from the late sixth to the ninth centuries, mainly in Irish, Scottish, and English monasteries. It was translated mainly from the Latin Vulgate into Latin.



Alfred the Great had the Ten Commandments, part of Exodus, Psalms, and the Acts of the Apostles translated from the Vulgate. He lived from 849-899.

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While it was a blessing to have these portions of the scriptures, there were at least three problems:

- a) They were all translations of the Latin Vulgate and not of the original Hebrew and Greek.
- b) While these men did their best, the translations were not the best.
- c) The translations were not available to the masses but were simply tools to help the priests learn and understand Latin better.

A Christian group known as the Waldensians came into existence in Lyon, and then by the late 1170's had spread to the Cottian Alps. The teachings of these noble saints came into conflict with the Roman Church and by 1215 they were declared heretical. The result was severe persecution and they were nearly annihilated. Yet by the 1500's they had embraced the Protestant Reformation and by 1631 were regarded as the early forerunners of the Reformation. It was they who taught the priesthood of all believers, the congregational structure, the Lord's Supper and Baptism.

For the following three hundred years there was virtually no progress in the translation into English for it was the language of the common man. The nobles spoke French and the Roman church spoke Latin. The result was the common people were kept in ignorance of the teachings of the scriptures, except that which they were taught by the religious leaders. Life changed when the Bubonic or Black Death swept across Western Europe and England. It is estimated that between 75 and 200 million people died and from what can be gleaned, on average one out of every four people died in England. The reality of death brought unspeakable grief from two avenues. There was uncertainty about where the loved one was in the hereafter, and secondly, what about oneself? The prominent question was, "If I get stricken with this disease and die, where will I be?" That which the commoner had been taught was that there was Heaven, Hell, purgatory and Limbo (a place where the righteous who died before being baptized, while not officially recognized by the Catholic church, it did produce revenue). The adults were taught that at death they went to purgatory, and in their spiritual ignorance, fearing the flames of purgatory, they sought even more devotion. The Roman church sought to quell their concerns and fears by seeking more money for indulgences, and the untaught people paid of what little they had for penances. The fact that the popes were living in France at Avignon and France was the enemy of England, did not help the situation. The people were torn apart, on one hand staying loyal to the church of Rome and yet hating the pope living in France. The Roman priests did not help much for they only read the Bible in Latin and their knowledge was limited to the few prayers and phrases learnt from memory. It was into this darkness and spiritual confusion Wycliffe came, the "Morning Star" of the Reformation.



Aelfric was an English Abbot who was apparently the greatest prose writer of his time. Being exceedingly clever he wrote the *Hepateuch*, which was the first Genesis to Judges in the vernacular of that time. This was done somewhere in the late 900 to 1000.



In 1205 Stephen Langton who was both a Roman Catholic cardinal and the Archbishop of Canterbury, was the man who divided the Bible into the chapter divisions we have today.



Richard Rolle de Hampole was an English hermit and poet of whom it is said that he with William Shoreham translated the Psalms into metric verse that was in 1325. Whither William Shoreham had any part in the translating is open to debate.

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Wycliffe was born between 1325 and 1340. He was a very clever man, was educated in Oxford, eventually being the foremost theologian of that time. Seeing the corruptions of the church, he spoke against its teaching of transubstantiation and rejected the papal authority, resulting in his being fired from Oxford in 1382. It was his conviction that each man was accountable to God. Therefore, if he was to be accountable, the individual had to have the Bible in his own language to know what he was accountable for! Wycliffe undertook the enormous task of handwriting the Bible into English in the 1380's, using the translation of the Old Testament which had been done by others. Those who agreed with him were called Lollards (such as John Purvey), and in the twenty years after his death a great number of these saints were burned at the stake with their Bibles hung around their necks. In time Wycliffe translated the first handwritten manuscripts of the entire Bible in English. These include the thirty-nine Old Testament books, the twenty-seven New Testament books, and the fourteen books of the apocrypha.



John Purvey (c. 1354 –1414) who was one of Wycliffe's followers, revised Wycliffe's translation in 1388.



Another man who agreed with John Wycliffe was John Huss who was burned at the stake in 1415. The kindling consisted of manuscripts of Wycliffe's. His last earthly words were, "In one hundred years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed." One hundred and two years later Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses of Contention into the church door of Castle Church in Wittenberg.



Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press and the first book ever to be printed was the Latin Vulgate. It was printed in Mainz, Germany in 1455 and was known as the "Gutenberg Bible". The printing press became essential to the Reformation.



After Gutenberg came Thomas Linacre who also was an Oxford professor. In 1490's Linacre decided to learn Greek and discovered it so dissimilar to the Latin Vulgate that he made the declaration, "Either this (the original Greek) is not the Gospel . . . or we are not Christians." The Latin Vulgate was so corrupt it no longer contained the pure gospel. In the providential timing of God, Thomas Linacre was followed by John Colet who also was an Oxford professor. Having read the New Testament in Greek, he translated it into English for his students.



In 1496 John Colet, another Oxford professor and the son of the Mayor of London, started reading the New Testament in Greek and translated it into English for his students at Oxford, and later for the public at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. The people were so hungry to hear the Word of God in a language they could understand that within six months there were 20,000 people packed in the church, and at least that many outside trying to get in! Fortunately for Colet, he was a powerful man with friends in high places, so he managed to escape execution.

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In considering the experiences of Linacre and Colet, Erasmus was so moved to correct the corrupt Latin Vulgate that in 1516, with the help of printer John Froben, he published a Greek-Latin Parallel New Testament. The Latin part was not the corrupt Vulgate, but his own fresh rendering of the text from the more accurate and reliable Greek, which he had managed to collect from a half-dozen partial old Greek New Testament manuscripts he had acquired. This was a milestone for it was the first non-Latin Vulgate text of the scripture to be produced in a millennium, and the first to come off a printing press. This translation showed how corrupt and inaccurate the Latin Vulgate was and the importance of going back to the original Greek and original Hebrew (Old Testament) languages to maintain accuracy . . . and to translate them faithfully into the languages of the common people, whether that be English, German, or any other tongue. There was no sympathy for this translation by the Catholic church, rather it deemed it an “illegal activity”. Interestingly, this was the forerunner to the Textus Receptus.



William Tyndale was trained in Greek and Hebrew and earned his bachelors degree from Oxford in 1512 when he was 16-17 years of age. He was the first man ever to translate the Bible in English, and it was his desire that the ploughboy would be able to read the Bible for himself. He was a brilliant linguist, being fluent in eight languages. In contemplating a new translation of the Bible in the 1520's, he was aware that England still had its edict banning the printing of the Bible. Traveling to Germany he learnt ancient Hebrew, and when in Europe translated a great deal of the Bible into English. In 1525 he completed his first translation of the New Testament, which got printed the next year. Later he revised it. There were passages which he found hard to translate, consequently, at times he used Luther's German translations and the Latin Vulgate, but his translation of the New Testament was based on the Greek text.

In the translating of the scriptures he coined the words “Passover”, “scapegoat”, and “beautiful”. Tyndale made changes which bothered the Catholic clergy. He changed “congregation” for “church”, and “elder” for “priest. An interesting example of his changes is 1 Tim. 2:12. Tyndale translated it as: “I suffer not a woman to teach, neither to have authority over a man: but for [her] to be in silence.” The KJV here has “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” The key difference is, in the translation of Tyndale, he renders it, “have authority,” while the KJV renders it “usurp authority.”

He produced five editions but the best known is the one of 1534. He did not live to complete the Old Testament, but did translate it from Genesis to 2 Chronicles. In 1535 he was arrested in Antwerp and was convicted of heresy, strangled, and then his body burnt at the stake. The charge of heresy was a corrupt translation of the Bible which was, in reality, a brilliant translation, but the clergy were afraid of the common folk reading the Bible, and thus he had to be put to death. However, his being arrested did stop the translating, for God had another man ready to continue His work. History records that his prayer at the stake were, “Lord open the King of England's eyes”. It was a wonderful case of Isaiah 65:24 being fulfilled, for unknown to William, months before his death an English version consisting mainly of his own work was printed in England with Henry VIII's blessing.



At the same time as Tyndale was translating the Bible, Martin Luther in 1517 was publicly showing the error of Romanism and on 31st October 1517 he nailed his 95 Theses of Contention to the door of the Wittenberg Church. Following the Diet of Worms Council in 1521 Luther was exiled, and during that exile he translated the Bible into German from the 1516 Greek-Latin translation by Erasmus, and published it in September 1522. In 1523 He published the German translation of the Pentateuch, and in 1529 another translation of the German New Testament. In the 1530's he published the entire Bible into German. By the end of 1525 he had translated the New Testament into English.

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Coverdale began where Tyndale was stopped, filling in the untranslated Old Testament passages with his own translation from the Latin Vulgate and Luther's German Bible. On Monday 6th October 1535 there was printed the first Bible in English, and is known as the Coverdale Bible. Three years later in 1538 he made a new translation.



In 1537 John Rogers printed the second complete English Bible. However, he did not print it under his own name but the pseudonym of "Thomas Matthew". It was a composite of Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament, Coverdale's Bible, and some of his own translation. It is commonly known as Matthew-Tyndale Bible, having a second edition printed in 1549.



Years after the printing of John Rogers' 1537 Bible, Thomas Crammer the Archbishop of Canterbury, at the behest of Henry VIII, was commissioned to publish the Great Bible. Henry VIII did not commission the translation of the Bible due to a spiritual concern. He wanted to divorce his wife and marry his mistress, but the Pope would not allow it. Henry went ahead and married her anyway and renounced Roman Catholicism, thus releasing England from the domination of Rome. He was already the governmental head of England but now he added to himself the headship of the Church. This became known as the Anglican church or the Church of England. Defying the wishes of Rome, he funded the printing of the scriptures in England. It was the first legally printed English Bible. Despite it being done out of spite, it was a situation where Psalm 76:10 is seen to be true, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee".



Edward VI became the king during the Reformation and the good news of the Bible swiftly progressed. This was too much for Satan and it had to be hindered in some way. This was accomplished by Mary Tudor, Edward's sister, who ascended the Throne in 1553.



Mary was and is known as "bloody Mary" because of her slaughtering of hundreds of Protestants. She was a major obstacle to the printing of the Bible in English. Her supreme purpose was to return England to Romanism, thus keeping the people in spiritual darkness. Reversing all Edward's advances in its availability, she had John Matthews and Thomas Crammer burned at the stake in 1555. Many Protestants fled from England and it was known as the "Marian Exile".



The church at Geneva in Switzerland was very sympathetic to the Protestant refugees and there they found a safe haven. These reformers were led by Miles Coverdale, John Foxe, Thomas Sampson, and William Whittingham. In Geneva, under John Calvin and John Knox, there was a determination to produce a Bible for the exiles by which they could educate their families.

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Calvin completed the New Testament in 1557 and the complete Bible in 1560. It is known as the “Geneva Bible”. At times it is referred to as the “Breeches Bible”, from the description of the clothing God made Adam and Eve, with the word “Breeches” being the old form of “Britches”. This was the first Bible to have numbered verses in the chapters thus making references easier. There were also added a large number of marginal notes. It is considered to be the first English Study Bible and was the translation of choice for over one hundred years when between 1560 and 1644 a minimum of 144 editions were published. This translation heavily influenced the 1611 KJV, which contained ninety percent of William Tyndale's original English translation.

Interestingly, the Geneva Bible was more popular than the King James, which was seen as “modern” and open to suspect. This was to continue for decades after the 1611 KJV was published. The Geneva was the first bible taken to America, being the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims, and of the Protestant Reformation. It had so many marginal notes which were so strong against the institutional church, it was decided to print another Bible with less inflammatory notes. In 1568 a new Bible was printed called the Bishops Bible, and although 19 editions were printed between 1568 and 1606 and referred to as the “rough draft” of the King James, it never gained much popularity.

William Shakespeare quotes hundreds of times in his plays from the Geneva translation of the Bible. It is truly the “Bible of the Protestant Reformation.” Strangely, the famous Geneva Bible has been out-of-print since 1644, so the only way to obtain one is to either purchase an original printing of the Geneva Bible, or a less costly facsimile reproduction of the original 1560 Geneva Bible.

By 1580 the Roman Catholic church recognized it had lost the battle and that the Scriptures were available in England. To combat this, the Roman Catholic church in 1582 decided to have its own translation. They used the corrupt Latin Vulgate and published an English Bible with all the distortions and corruptions that Erasmus had shown and warned about three quarters of a century earlier. The Roman Catholic Bible was translated at Rheims and became known as the “Rheims New Testament”. The Douay Old Testament was translated by the church of Rome in 1609, and it with the Rheims New Testament was known as the “Doway/Rheims Version”.



The first Bible printed in America was in the Algonquin Indian Language by John Elliot in 1663. The first English Bible was by Robert Aitken in 1782 and was the KJV. This was the only Bible to be authorized by the United States Congress. In 1808 Robert Aitken's daughter Jane was the first woman ever to print a Bible. In 1791 Isaac Collins improved the quality and size of the typesetting and produced the first “Family Bible”, it was KJV. In 1791 He produced the first illustrated Bible in America.

The Change of Monarchy



When Queen Elizabeth 1 died, Prince James VI of Scotland became James I of England. In time, the leading Protestant clergy spoke to him of the need of a new translation to replace the Bishops Bible which was printed in 1568. Consequently, in January 1604 James summoned the leading clerics to Hampton Court for several reasons. Foremost was to fulfill the need for a new translation. The leading proponent of this new translation was Dr. John Reynolds. This proposal was not met with great enthusiasm, but since James had authorized it, nothing else mattered. That original document that authorized this new translation can be seen in the Manuscript Room at Cambridge University. James was not interested in a new translation for the spiritual enrichment of the people, but because to him the Geneva was, to use his words “the worst”, despite it being the official Bible during the time he reigned in Scotland. It seems that his main rejection was that in the notes of Ex. 1:19 the Geneva Bible inferred that the midwives were justified in disobeying the king's command. The reason for the push for a new translation was thus both political and

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religious, and meant to protect James' authority. With the removal of the notes, the new translation, the KJV, was more like the Roman Catholic Rheims-Douai version rather than the previous Protestant translations. It was James who, with the assistance of the leading clergy, determined who the translators would be, how they would be organized, and what rules they would follow in the translation.

The Organization and The Translators of the Authorized Version

It was decided to have six groups of the leading scholars of the day to do the translation, three for the Old Testament, two for the New Testament, and one for the Apocrypha. Two teams met at Oxford, two met at Cambridge, and two at Westminster Abbey. Altogether there were forty-seven men who worked on this new version.

Group one met at Westminster Abbey and translated the historical books, beginning with Genesis and ending with the Second Book of Kings. They were Dr's. William Bedwell, Richard Clarke, Robert Tighe, Hadrian Savavia, John Laifield, John Overall, Francis Burleigh, Geoffrey King, Richard Thompson and Lancelot Andrews.

Group two met at Cambridge and translated Chronicles to the end of the Song of Songs. They were Dr's. John Richardson, Lawrence Chaderton, Roger Andrews, Robert Spaulding, Andrew Bing with Mr's Edward Lively and Francis Dillingham. In case it be thought that those who were not doctors had lesser qualifications, it is to be noted that Edward Lively is still considered to be, "one of the best linguists in the world". There was great dependence on his skill in oriental languages. Sadly, he died in May 1605 from quinsey, which is an abscess between the back of the tonsil and the wall of the throat. He was the author of a Latin exposition of the minor prophets.

Francis Dillingham was a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge. He was described as, "The great Grecian." He collected out of Cardinal Bellarmine's writings all the concessions made by that acute author in favor of Protestantism, and published a Manual of the Christian faith taken from the Fathers, and a variety of treatises on different points belonging to the Romish controversy.

The first Oxford group translation began with Isaiah to the end of the Old Testament. It consisted of Dr's. John Harding, John Reynolds, Thomas Holland, Richard Kilby, Miles Smith, Richard Brett and Daniel Fairclough.

It was to the second Oxford group to translate the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Revelation. The translators were Dr's. Thomas Ravis, George Abbot, Richard Eddes, Giles Tomson, Henry Savile, John Peryn, Ralph Ravens, and John Harmar.

The second group of translators at Westminster were responsible for translating all the Epistles of the New Testament. They were Dr's. William Barlow, John Spences, Roger Fenton, Ralph Hutchinson, William Dakins, Michael Rabbet, and T. Sanderson.

The last group translated the Apocrypha at Cambridge and they were Dr's. John Duport, William Brainthwaite, Jeremiah Radcliffe, Samuel Ward, Andrew Downes, John Aglionby, Leonard Hutten, Thomas Bilson, Richard Bancroft, and John Bois.

As we review the history of these men, the translating of the scriptures was not a hobby or a "now and again" exercise, but using the natural ability and godly zeal, they gave their time, energies and life's devotion to this great work. To sit and write the entire Bible by hand was an enormous job, demanding long hours and primitive equipment. For others they knew exile, and when we lift our Bibles today and read them in English, let us never forget that many were burned alive at the stake, others were tortured and exiled. This privilege has been given to us at the cost of the blood of many of these men.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia