

AN  
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND  
TO OUR

# English Bible



Prepared by:  
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**2005**



**An  
Historical Background  
To Our**

**ENGLISH  
BIBLE**

**13 Lessons**

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**Lesson One**

***“The Birth of the Bible”***

There was a period of time when there was no Bible! This may sound strange to some, but it is true. From the beginning of man on earth until the time of Moses, there was no written message from God...at least, no record of such has been found. In fact, there are no references to such in the Bible itself. There are no remains of such to be found. We have remains or specimens of heathen writings such as the work of Hamurabi (1900-2000 BC). The book of Job gives no evidence of any written laws given by God. It is probable that God gave verbal laws concerning Sacrifices and Clean Animals, etc., and they were passed on by word of mouth to succeeding generations. It is obvious from the Bible, however, that man was under Law to God but no indication that it was written down (Genesis 4:3-7; Romans 2:12-16).

**THE BIRTH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

God so designed man to be able to basically know right from wrong, but placed within him a conscience that helps to encourage him to do right (Romans 2:12-16; Acts 23:1). For centuries, man was left without a written code of living, except what he was able to understand for himself. In God's plan of things, it was necessary for Him to select out of the nations a peculiar people unto Himself to be that Nation through whom He would bring Redemption to sinful, rebellious mankind. God chose Abraham to be the father of the Israelite Nation and also the one through whom the Redeemer would come (Genesis 12:1-4; Galatians 3:15-19). A Covenant Law was given to govern the Israelites while they were gathered at the base of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). However, the first time Moses was commanded to write something down was recorded in Exodus 17:14 in regards to a promise of God. He was to write it in a book, indicating a collection of things would be included. The first five books of the Old Testament, called the Pentateuch, was written down by Moses and preserved (Acts 7:22; Exodus 24:4-7; Deuteronomy 31:9, 24, 26; etc.). The approximate time of writing is given as 1491 down to 1451 BC.

The remainder of the books of the Old Testament were written over a period of time from 1451 down to about 400 BC. The writers that God used to write down the Old Testament books were: Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai, Plus the sixteen prophets whose book bears their name. More prophets were involved, but we have no way of knowing specifically who they were.

**THE BIRTH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The message from God this time was first spoken by Jesus during His public ministry. After His death, burial, and resurrection, His apostles were endowed by the Holy Spirit to speak God's revelation to man and guided them in the presenting of such (John 16:13). It wasn't until about 48-50 AD that the books of the New Testament began to be written down. The last book was written about 96 AD. The writers of the New Testament books were: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude.

Thus, the Bible's origin covers a period of some sixteen hundred years in the writing, using more than thirty-two different writers in the process, and when the sixty-six books were gathered together, they make one harmonious book from beginning to end.

### **THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE**

One of the unique features of the birth of the Bible is its claim to be "Inspired" by God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible not only makes the claim of being a Revelation from God, but also that this Revelation was written down by Inspiration (Ephesians 3:3-5; 2 Peter 3:15-16). This concept gives an assurance to the reader of the correctness of that which has been given through human instrumentality (2 Peter 1:21), whether spoken orally or written down, when under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-13). Complete trust can be given to the Bible as being an Inspired Message from God Himself.

The following are some of the suggestions for believing in the Inspiration of the Bible, and that it is not a mere work of men:

1. The Old Testament lays claim to such. Some 3800 plus times the Old Testament says: "***The Lord spoke,***" "***The word of the Lord came,***" "***The Lord said,***" etc. (2 Samuel 23:2; Isaiah 1:2; Ezekiel 1:3, etc.).
2. The New Testament lays claim to such (1 Corinthians 2:9-13; Acts 2:4; 2 Peter 3:15-16; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 1:11-12, etc.).
3. Jesus recognized the Old Testament as Inspired (Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:44-45)
4. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the Apostles to guide them into all truth (John 16:13; Acts 1:8).
5. The New Testament writers not only claimed guidance by the Spirit, but expected obedience to their teaching as the Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).
6. The Apostles gave their lives believing in its divinity.
7. The early Christians accepted the concept of its Inspiration.
8. Its morality is the highest and it demands purity and holiness.
9. Its impartiality is obvious, telling both the good and bad about anyone.
10. Its calmness in recording events and teachings.
11. Its brevity.
12. Its all-sufficiency (up to date).
13. Its reasonableness—God is lifted up; the true description of man is given; but that man can be redeemed.
14. Because it has endured.
15. Its great influence on the lives in the world.
16. The unity of the Bible—no contradictions—in complete harmony.
17. Its agreement with Natural Science, but not its false theories.
18. Its accuracy in History.
19. Its fulfilled prophecies—especially concerning Christ.
20. It is man's only reliable guide to know the answers to the many perplexing questions about man.

## WHO GAVE US THE BIBLE?

### **God, The Father**

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

### **The Holy Spirit**

(2 Peter 1:20-21)

### **God's Son**

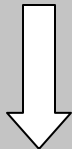
(Hebrews 1:1-2)

### **The Holy Spirit**

(John 16:13-15)

### **The Prophets**

(Hebrews 1:1-2)



### **The Old Testament**

### **Law of Moses**

(Deuteronomy 4:2, 7-8, 13)

### **Apostles—Prophets**

(Ephesians 3:3-5)



### **The New Testament**

### **Law of Christ**

(Hebrews 9:15-17; ! Cor. 9:21)

Lesson Two

***“The Preservation of the Bible:  
Its Canonization”***

It would seem to be reasonable to infer that God would not go to all the trouble to give an Inspired, Complete Revelation to mankind and not see to its preservation. Thus, it is not surprising to hear Jesus say in Matthew 24:35: ***“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”*** Nor is it surprising to read the words of the Apostle Peter when he wrote: ***“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever.”*** (1 Peter 1:23). The purpose of this lesson and the next one is to see how God has providentially seen to the preservation of His Word through the centuries.

**MEANING AND PURPOSE OF CANONIZATION**

The Term, BIBLE, COMES FROM A Greek word, ***Biblos***, meaning “the book.” The term, HOLY BIBLE, was given to the completed Old and New Testament books by Chrysostom in the fourth century AD. The HOLY BIBLE is a collection of writings preserved by the Jewish people and earth Christians, brought together in one volume, and looked upon as Sacred and Holy—being Divinely given of God as His Revelation to mankind.

The Term, CANON, is used by Scholars to indicate the process of collecting together those writings considered Inspired of God and formed into a final authoritative “Rule of Faith.” At least three reasons have been given by some for the “Canonization” of the Bible:

- 1) *To preserve the inspired writings from corruption. As long as the prophets or the apostles were alive, there was little fear of this. But upon their death, there needed to be a standard by which faith and practice could be measured.*
- 2) *To prevent the addition of uninspired books. Such books were being written during this time and used in many of the churches. It was important that a distinction be made between the Inspired and the uninspired books.*
- 3) *To prevent any attempt to destroy the Bible.*

**CANONIZATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The process that led to the eventual Canonization of the Old Testament books was a long one since they were being written over a period of some 1000-1100 years at least. The very fact that they were written down by the prophets indicated that God wanted His message preserved.

The **“BOOKS OF LAW”** given by Moses at Mt. Sinai were kept in the Tabernacle or later in the Temple (Deuteronomy 31:26). These five books contained the Law for the people of Israel and were to be read unto the people at least every seven years (Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 31:9-11). Each succeeding generation was strongly urged to read and follow the teachings of the **“BOOKS OF LAW.”** (Joshua 1:7-8; 11:15; Judges 3:4; 1 Kings 2:13; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 23:18). It was the **“BOOKS OF LAW”** that had been so neglected by Israel that caused such grave concern on the part of King Josiah (c. 640 BC) (2 Kings 22:8-11). It is no



wonder then that Judah, upon her return from Babylonian captivity, began strongly to keep the ordinances of God as given in the “**BOOK OF MOSES**” (Ezra 6:16-19). It was Ezra’s great desire to “*seek the Law of God, to do it, and to teach it to Israel.*” (Ezra 7:10).

As new books were given by God, they were added to this collection of writings. The last book of the Old Testament was believed to have been written around 400 BC by the prophet Malachi. He ends his book with an admonition to heed God’s Law as given through Moses and watch for the special prophet God would send to them to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:4-6). Thus ended the long line of inspired writings given to Israel by God’s Messengers.

The books that compose the Old Testament Canon are not Canonical because a group of men made them so, but because they had the stamp of their Divine origin which helped to distinguish them from all other books. Also, the Old Testament Canon was complete because no further Inspired books were given. By the third century BC, the translation of the Hebrew text into Greek (LXX) showed that these books had been gathered together and recognized as Canonical.

But a more significant fact is that Jesus, Himself, gave His stamp of approval on the entire Old Testament twice:

- 1) **Luke 24:44**—He refers to the prophecies about Himself written in the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms, which are the three major divisions of the Hebrew Old Testament.
- 2) **Luke 11:51**—He encompasses the entire Hebrew Bible in referring to the first martyr (Abel in Genesis 4:8) through the last martyr (Zacharias in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21). 2 Chronicles is the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament as the Jews arranged them. This is the equivalent to referring to the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation.

In addition, the New Testament quotes or makes reference to all the books of the Old Testament: thus, giving its stamp of approval to the Old Testament Canon.

### **CANONIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The completion of the New Testament writings only required a period of about 50 years (48-96 AD), and this was accomplished during the lifetime of at least one of the Apostles of Christ (John). Again, the very fact that these books were written down indicated God wanted the Message preserved for future generations.

Indications are found in the New Testament books themselves that they were to be collected together and read in the churches.

- 1) **1 Corinthians 14:37**—What Paul wrote was the commandment of the Lord.
- 2) **2 Corinthians 1:13**—He expected them to acknowledge his writings as from the Lord.
- 3) **Ephesians 3:3-5**—What he wrote down was God’s revelation about salvation through Christ.
- 4) **Colossians 4:16**—This letter was to be read and passed on to the Laodiceans. And the letter from the Laodiceans was to be read by them.
- 5) **1 Thessalonians 5:27**—This letter was to be read to all the holy brethren.
- 6) **1 Timothy 4:13**—Scriptures were to be read before the church.

- 7) **2 Peter 3:15-16**—Paul’s letters were already known widely as Scripture.
- 8) **Jude 18**—He quotes from 2 Peter 3:3.
- 9) **Revelation 1:3**—A blessing is pronounced on the one who reads and keeps the words written in this book.

Historically, there is evidence that these New Testament writings were being collected together, copied, and circulated among the churches by the end of the first century.

- 1) **Clement of Rome**—In AD 96, he quoted from 1 Corinthians and indicated familiarity with other apostolic writings.
- 2) **Ignatius** (a disciple of John) in 107 AD wrote of the inspiration and authority of the writings of the Apostles.
- 3) **Polycarp** (a disciple of John also) in 115 AD called the apostolic writings, “Scripture.”
- 4) **Justin Martyr**—In 148 AD, he stated that the memoirs of the Apostles and those who followed them (Mark) and the Gospels should be read along with the prophets in the assembly.

During the second Century more testimony can be found that attests to the New Testament being finalized into a collected form.

- 1) The following books were universally accepted as indicated from early writings and archaeological finds: The four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John.
- 2) The remaining books were generally accepted, but questioned in a few locations: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.
- 3) References to the books of the New Testament during the second century:
  - a) **Irenaeus** (130-202 AD)—His writings quote from all of the New Testament books except Philemon and 3<sup>rd</sup> John in his attacks on Gnosticism which was a major doctrinal problem in his time. These two books did not contain any material to be used in his arguments.
  - b) **The Muratorian Fragment** (AD 170)—This is an incomplete manuscript listing all of the New Testament books but Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John. The absence of these is attributed to the fact that the listing is from a fragmentary document. It goes on to declare that the Apocalypse of Peter is a forgery and that the Shepherd of Hermes is a recent book.
  - c) **Justin martyr**, in his writings (145-148 AD), mentions Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and Hebrews.
  - d) **Clement of Alexandria**, in the late second century, referred to all three epistles of John.
  - e) **Clement of Rome** (95 AD), **Ignatius of Antioch** (107 AD), and **Polycarp** (108 AD)—All of the New Testament is made use of in their writings except Luke, Colossians, 1 & 2 John, Jude, and Revelation.
  - f) **In summary**, it is noted that all 27 books of the New Testament are quoted by one or more of the above writers.

The third century was an age of learning and intellectual ability. Much was done in translating the Bible into other languages, as well as copies of the Bible made available widely. A diligent effort was made to keep separate the Inspired writings from other writings that were

often read for edification (Apostolic Fathers, Epistles of Clement, Barnabas, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, and the Didache). Even many spurious or “false claim” gospels and letters had begun to be circulated that needed to be separated completely. Also, the false teachers and false doctrines were becoming more prevalent and much disputation began to arise over which books were to be accepted. It was during this time that a major effort was made to clearly indicate which books were to be accepted in the Canon of the New Testament.

By the fourth century there was universal acceptance of all 27 New Testament books, with but few objections by a small minority of people.

**COPIES OF UNINSPIRED WRITERS WHO QUOTED  
THE NEW TESTAMENT**

<b>Writers</b>	<b>Gospels</b>	<b>Acts</b>	<b>Gen. Letters</b>	<b>Paul's Letters</b>	<b>Revel.</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Justin Martyr (150 AD)</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>330</b>
<b>Irenaeus (135-202 AD)</b>	<b>1038</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>1819</b>
<b>Clement of Alexandria (160-220 AD)</b>	<b>1017</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>1127</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2406</b>
<b>Origen (185-253 AD)</b>	<b>9231</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>7778</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>17922</b>
<b>Tertullian (150-220 AD)</b>	<b>3822</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>2609</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>7258</b>
<b>Hippolytus (c. 220 AD)</b>	<b>734</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>1378</b>
<b>Eusebius (270-340 AD)</b>	<b>3258</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>1592</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5176</b>

The above chart was produced by a Mr. Burgon

Lesson Three

***“The Preservation of the Bible:  
Its Integrity”***

Even though we have existing manuscripts of the Bible that date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, an important question has been asked: *“Just how accurate has the original text of the Bible been preserved through the 1900+ years since its completion.* It should be obvious that no “original manuscripts” have been found of the Old or New Testament books. Does that mean that there is no way of knowing what was originally given by God? The following thoughts should be kept in mind as we go through this lesson:

- 1) **God promised to preserve His Word (Matthew 24:35).**
- 2) **We have many thousands of Mss. of the Old and New Testament books that help us to know what was in the original text.**
- 3) **The obvious accuracy of those who copied the Scriptures has been abundantly illustrated by Bible Scholars.**
- 4) **Other forms of evidences that help to establish the original text add their weight to the above.**

**EXISTING COPIES OF HEBREW AND GREEK MANUSCRIPTS**

**Hebrew Mss. of the Old Testament:** The oldest Hebrew Mss. that had been found up to the early 1900s were very few in number and mostly fragments or partial documents. It is believed that most Hebrew Mss. were either destroyed and/or reduced to one from which copies could be made. Until recent times, the oldest Hebrew Mss. that had been dated, is one containing the Books of the Prophets only, dating at 916 AD. Another Mss. had been found that was dated 856 AD, but there is a question over the accuracy of dating. All other Hebrew Mss. would date after this period of time. By the early 1900s, some 1700 Mss., fragments, and partial documents had been discovered. All indications point to most of these being influenced by the “Massoretic” text which had been carefully translated since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

In 1947, there was a break-through when the “Dead Sea Scrolls” were found. Among these scrolls there were thousands of fragments of the Old Testament and hundreds of non-canonical Jewish writings. What is so important about these finds is their date. Scholars have dated them from the third century BC to the second Century AD, covering a period of over 300 years. This gives a possibility of 1000 years earlier manuscript of the Old Testament. This made possible for Scholars to be able to compare manuscripts to see how accurate the Hebrew text had been preserved for 1000 years. All fears of drastic changes in the text were dispelled by these findings and comparisons. Also, existing copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch have confirmed its accuracy as well.

**Greek Mss. of the New Testament:** Extant copies of Greek Mss. of the New Testament date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD to the time of printing (15<sup>th</sup> century). For dating purposes, these Mss. are divided into three types: PAPHYRUS, UNCIALS, and CURSIVES.

**Papyrus Mss.**—Papyrus was the type of writing material used up to about the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. After this, expensive and durable Vellum or parchment was used and especially on important documents, such as the Bible. It is very possible that the original documents of the New Testament in particular were written at first on Papyrus. Until recent finds of Papyrus Scrolls and Codices in Egypt, scholars had only a few Papyrus Mss. (19 in 1912). Some of the more important Papyrus Mss. are:

- 1) **John Ryland Papyrus** (150 AD). This contains only John 18:31-33, 37-38.
- 2) **Papyrus Bodmer II** (200 AD). This contains only John 1:1-6:11; 6:35-14:26.
- 3) **Chester Beatty Papyri** (200-300 AD). This contains 10 books of the New Testament more or less complete.
- 4) **Oxyrhynchus Papyri** (200-300 AD). This contains some 20 Mss.

**Uncial Mss.**—Uncial Mss. were written mostly on Vellum, which dates them from about the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD up to the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The writing on this material was in Capital letters, which again helps to date the Mss. It is during this period of time that extant copies of the New Testament grew in number. By 1912, some 168 Mss. had been found of Uncial Mss.—either whole, partial, or fragments. The more important Uncial Mss. are:

- 1) **Codex Sinaiticus** (4<sup>th</sup> century AD). This is a complete New Testament.
- 2) **Codex Alexandrinus** (5<sup>th</sup> century AD). Only a part of Matthew, John, and 2 Corinthians are missing.
- 3) **Codex Vaticanus** (4<sup>th</sup> century AD). The last part of Hebrews, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Revelation are missing.
- 4) **Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus** (5<sup>th</sup> century AD). All New Testament books are represented except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John, but none are complete.
- 5) **Codex Bezae** (6<sup>th</sup> century AD). Contains the Gospels, most of Acts, and a small fragment of the General Letters.

**Cursive Mss.**—Cursive Mss. are much like our “long-hand” writing. Paper became prevalent from about the 9<sup>th</sup> century on and seems to have helped initiate a change in style of writing. By 1912, there were 2318 Cursive Mss. that had been found. Even though they are of a much later date than Uncials or Papyrus, their value is important because of the type of text that they represent. Only 46 of the 2318 Cursive Mss. are of the complete New Testament. The more important Cursive Mss. are:

- 1) **No. 2** (15<sup>th</sup> century AD). The first printed New Testament Greek Text was made from this Mss.
- 2) **No. 33** (9<sup>th</sup> century AD). This Mss. has been called the “Queen of the Cursives.”
- 3) **No. 61** (15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century AD). It was the first Mss. to be found containing 1 John 5:7 as found in the KJV.
- 4) **No. 223** (11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century AD). Possibly one of the handsomest of the New Testament Mss. in existence.
- 5) **No. 274** (10<sup>th</sup> century AD). Contains a shorter ending to Mark 16:9 to the end of the chapter in the margin of the text.
- 6) **No. 461** (AD 835). The earliest Greek Mss. on Vellum that is dated.
- 7) **No. 579** (13<sup>th</sup> century AD). This has a double termination to Mark’s Gospel.
- 8) **No. 629** (14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century AD). This has all but the Gospels in Greek and Latin. It also has 1 John 5:7 in it.

- 9) **No. 2040** (12<sup>th</sup> century AD). Contains a commentary by Andreas.

In addition to these three groupings of Mss., there are also the “Lectionaries” that are Bible Lessons with the Biblical text connected with the lessons. Some 1565 of these had been discovered by 1912. The total copies of Greek Mss. in 1912 were 4,070, but additional finds has raised this number to over 5000 Mss. today.

### **EXISTING TRANSLATIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS**

One of the means of checking on the reliability of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is the use of the extant translations of the Old Testament. The earliest known translation was into the Greek language by Jewish Scholars at Alexandria, Egypt, dating around 285-170 BC. This is referred to as the Septuagint (LXX). Existing copies of the LXX date to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (**Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus, and Ephraemi**). This was the Old Testament that the early Christians made use of.

The “Targums” were Jewish paraphrasing of the Hebrew texts into Aramaic. They were probably first written down about the first century AD. Existing copies date to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

As the Gospel spread throughout Syria, there arose a need for a translation into their own language. Evidence has been found that as early as 165 AD a translation was made of the Gospels into Syriac. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, a standard translation superseded the various Old Syriac translations that was called the “Peshitta.” The earliest found Mss. is dated in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The New Testament was also early translated into Latin along with the Old Testament in various parts of the world. Close to 50 different copies of these Old Latin versions have been found. At the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, Jerome came out with a revised Latin translation that was called the “Vulgate.” This eventually became the adopted Bible by the Western churches. Some of the earliest English translations were made from the Vulgate. It is estimated that over 8000 Old Latin and Vulgate Mss. had been found up to 1912. Additional translations of both the Old and New Testaments are:

- 1) **Coptic** (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century AD). There are three distinct dialects among the Coptic versions, as well as some minor ones. Original versions date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.
- 2) **Armenian** (887 AD). It is believed to have been first translated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.
- 3) **Gothic** (6<sup>th</sup> century AD). Original translation in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.
- 4) **Ethiopic** (13<sup>th</sup> century AD). Original translation at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.
- 5) **Arabic** (8<sup>th</sup> century AD). Original translation in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.
- 6) **Georgian** (10<sup>th</sup> century AD). Originally translated in 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

### **EXISTING TRANSLATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS**

Translating of the New Testament began early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. In order to make use of them by Scholars, they must be re-translated back into the Greek language for comparison purposes. Again, these can serve as a means of arriving at the original text as first given by Inspiration. The oldest translation of the New Testament that we have a copy of dates to the 4<sup>th</sup>

century AD. Some of the more valuable are the Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Gothic, and Armenian versions (as dated above).

### **EXISTING COPIES OF UNINSPIRED WRITINGS**

Another area of research to arrive at the original text of the Bible is the uninspired writings of those who quoted or made reference to the Bible text much like we do today. Even an allusion to the Bible text may help in determining what the original text was.

The writings discovered in Palestine called the “Dead Sea Scrolls” contain a lot of help in evaluating the text of the Old Testament.

Uninspired writings referred to as “The Apostolic Fathers,” “Ante-Nicean Fathers,” and “Post-Nicean Fathers,” are dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. These writings can be used to help verify the New Testament Greek text. Following are the approximate dates of some of these writings:

1. Irenaeus of Lyons (185 AD).
2. Tertullian (150-220 AD).
3. Origen (Early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).
4. Cyprian (200-258 AD)
5. Lucian (Early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD)
6. Eusebius (Historian of the later 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).
7. Cyril of Alexandria (Early 400s AD).

It has been stated with some certainty by those who have made a study of these early writings that the New Testament could practically be restored from their quotations and references to the New Testament writings.

### **INTEGRITY OF THE BIBLE**

In order to arrive at what is considered the text of the Bible as originally given, four areas are consulted:

1. Ancient Manuscripts
2. Ancient Versions or Translations
3. Early uninspired writings that quote or allude to the Bible
4. The internal evidence of the Bible itself.

By judicious use of these four areas, any errors can be eliminated. Most of the differences to be found by comparing all of these Mss. are obviously copyist’s errors. While quite a few of these variations can affect the meaning of a text, not one of them affects an article of faith or a precept of duty that is not abundantly clear and sustained in other passages of the Bible. Following is a listing of the rules followed in determining the correct text of the Bible where there were variations:

- 1) The age of the text of a Mss. is more significant than the age of the Mss. itself.
- 2) Readings supported by ancient witnesses, however, especially from different groups, are generally preferable.
- 3) The reconstruction of the history of a variant is basic to judgment about it.

- 4) The quality rather than the quantity of witnesses is more important in determining a reading.
- 5) Identity of readings, particularly in errors, implies identity of origin.
- 6) The shorter reading is generally preferable.
- 7) The more difficult reading is generally preferable.
- 8) Readings which bear the earmarks of stylistic or other improvements are suspect.
- 9) Variants combining the appearance of improvement with the absence of its reality are suspect.
- 10) Readings which bear the earmarks of doctrinal controversy are suspect.
- 11) The reading is preferred which best suits the author's characteristic tendencies.
- 12) The reading is preferred which best explains the origin of all other variants in a given passage.

**--Wikgren's List**

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Scholars are convinced that our Bible today is as close to the original text as humanly possible. When one considers the following factors:

- 1) 1600 years in the Bible's production;
  - 2) Copies being made of it during the time of the Old Testament, and then copies of both were made for another 1400 years before printing;
  - 3) The irresistible temptation by a copyists to change a reading for one reason or another;
- it is amazing that there are no more problems than there are. It has been pointed out by those who are scholars in this field of Textual Criticism that even the worst Mss. do not pervert or set aside one article of faith or moral precept.



**Lesson Four**

***“A Brief History of the Early Translations of the Bible”***

As the Gospel spread throughout the known world of the first century and into the second, more and more need for translations into the languages of the people in these nations was called for. While the translation into the language that was understandable for the mass of people was of great value to them, they are also of great value for us today in helping to recover the exactness of the Bible text in its original language (Hebrew and Greek). Scholars have access to translations that have been found which date as early or earlier than the now existing Mss in the original languages.

**EARLY EFFORTS TO TRANSLATE THE OLD TESTAMENT**

By the time Christianity began, the Old Testament had already been translated into the Greek language by Jewish Scholars that may have lived in Alexandria, Egypt, covering a period of about 150 years (285-130 BC). This translation was used by the Apostles and the early church as their Old Testament. It was also used to translate the Old Testament into other languages.

In reaction to the Christian’s use of the LXX (Septuagint) Greek translation of the Old Testament, a pupil of Rabbi Akiba, Aquilla, finally came out with a slavish literal Greek translation of the Old Testament, using a current Hebrew text. This is date about 150-170 AD.

Another translation was made into the Greek language by a Hebrew Christian, named Theodotion, from the current Hebrew text, but was not so slavishly literal as Aquilla’s was. It is dated about 180-192 AD. It was favored over the old LXX (Septuagint) translation.

From 193-211 AD, another effort was made to bring out another Greek translation of the Old Testament by a man by the name of Symmachus. It was characterized as being in “elegant Greek” and “fidelity to the Hebrew text.”

Also, in the first part of the third century, Origen brought out his revision of the LXX. But he also brought out a book with six columns that he called his “Hexapla.” He included the following:

- 1) The current Hebrew text.
- 2) The same Hebrew text in Greek letters.
- 3) Aquilla’s Greek translation.
- 4) Symmachus’ Greek translation.
- 5) Theodotion’s Greek translation
- 6) His revision of the LXX

Jerome knew about it and consulted it in producing the vulgate translation at the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It was mentioned again in a 7<sup>th</sup> century writing that has been preserved. The Greek Old Testament Mss. has played an important role in the spread of the knowledge of God throughout the known world in the first three centuries.

## EARLY EFFORTS TO TRANSLATE THE NEW TESTAMENT

In addition to the Old Testament being translated into Greek, it would also undergo translations into many languages along with the New Testament. The original Mss. of the New Testament were in Greek, which made it easy for the Greek Old Testament to be combined with it and used by the early Christians. Some of our oldest Greek Mss. are of both the Old and New Testaments.

- 1) **Codex Sinaiticus** (340 AD). This Mss. contains the New Testament complete and parts of the Old Testament. It was secured in 1859 from a monastery at Mt. Sinai and is now in the British Museum, in London. It is believed to be one of the fifty copies of the Bible ordered by Constantine, Emperor of the Roman Empire, in 331 AD.
- 2) **Codex Alexandrinus** (5<sup>th</sup> century). This Mss. contains the Old and New Testaments with the exception of the following: Matthew 1:1-25:6; John 6:50-8:52; 2 Corinthians 4:13-12:6. It stands third or fourth in importance among Uncial Mss. It was placed in the British Museum in 1757.
- 3) **Codex Vaticanus** (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century). It was brought to Rome in 1448 where it has remained. However, a published edition was first issued by Tischendorf in 1867 for scholars to study. It originally contained the whole Bible, but is now lacking in portions of both Old and New Testaments.
- 4) **Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus** (5<sup>th</sup> century). This Mss. had writings over writings. The first writing was a Greek Mss of the Bible. The second writing was cleared away and the first writing brought to life to the extent that it was readable. It only contains parts of the Old and New Testaments. It resides in Paris.
- 5) **Codex Bezae** (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century). This Mss. only contains the Gospels, Acts, and a fragment of 3 John, and none of the Old Testament. But it is the oldest known Mss. that contains two languages side by side (Greek & Latin). It is believed to have been written in Gaul (France). It was placed in the University of Cambridge in 1581.

Translations began early to be made of both the Old and New Testaments into other languages. Following is a quick overview of the earliest:

- 1) **Syriac** (2<sup>nd</sup> century) (5 different versions circulating).
- 2) **Coptic** (2<sup>nd</sup> century) (3 distinct dialects).
- 3) **Latin** (2<sup>nd</sup> century) (several versions were circulating)
- 4) **Armenian** (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- 5) **Gothic** (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- 6) **Georgian** (5<sup>th</sup> century)
- 7) **Arabic** (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century).
- 8) **Ethiopic** (5<sup>th</sup> century).

The earliest known existing copies of any of these versions would be the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Two of these early translations deserve additional notice:

- 1) **Syriac Peshitta** (411 AD). This translation came about in an effort to combine the results of the five different versions then circulating into one version that would be accurate in the Syrian language. It soon superseded all others.
- 2) **Latin Vulgate** (c. 400 AD). Many Latin versions were circulating both of the Old and New Testaments. Jerome set about to combine these all into one accurate Latin version. he made use

of the Hebrew Text, the LXX, Greek text of the New Testament, and the existing Latin versions. In time it superseded all other versions and became the official Bible of the Western churches.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

After the passing of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the translation of the Bible into other languages seems to have slowed down drastically. This may have been due in part to the fact that most major languages had a translation by this time. But during this time the hierarchy over the churches had led to tighter control of even the copying of the Bible. This was only done in Latin and Greek within the walls of monasteries, far removed from everyday life of the people. Also, Latin became the official language of the Western churches, while Greek became the official language of the Eastern churches.

Lesson Five

***“Early Translations That Were  
Forerunners of Our English Bible”***

Even though it is believed that Christianity was introduced into Great Britain as early as the second century, progress was very slow until the sixth century. In 450 AD, England was invaded by the Teutons and their language changed to Anglo-Saxon. The mingling and commingling of languages forbade any recognized translation; thus, Latin was mostly used. Finally, efforts began to be made slowly to put the Bible into the language of the Britons.

- a) **Caedmon’s efforts.** He was a poet-singer and lived about 670 AD. After hearing the Monks translate the stories into their language, he would put it to poetic form and sing with a harp.
- b) **Aldhelm.** He was also a good musician. When people would not listen to sermons, he would sing them. It is believed that he first translated the Psalms into the Anglo-Saxon language about 700 AD. It is also believed that at the request of Aldhelm, a man by the name of Egbert produced a translation of the Gospels about the same time.
- c) **Bede.** He was called “the brightest light in Western Europe in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.” His life is dated at 674-735 AD. He translated the Gospel of John into Anglo-Saxon. A follower of his, Cuthbert, left the story of his death.
- d) **King Alfred.** His life is dated 848-901 AD. He was one of England’s best kings and scholars. He planned and promoted the intellectual and moral well-being of his subjects. Either he or one whom he appointed made a translation of the 10 commandments, other laws of the Pentateuch, and worked on the Psalm.
- e) **Aldred.** He was supposed to have taken an older Latin text and wrote between the lines in Anglo-Saxon of the Gospels. This work is dated in 950 AD.
- f) **Aelfric.** He was supposed to have translated portions of the Old Testament and the Gospels in about 1000 AD.

Upon the invasion of the Normans in 1066 AD, Anglo-Saxon was ostracized, and thus set in a long period of confusion of tongues; thus, preventing much of any kind of literature or the Bible being translated until the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The Middle Ages was noted for the appalling ignorance by the common man of the Word of God. Efforts by the religious hierarchy had been successful in keeping the Bible in the Latin and Greek Languages so that the common person could not read it. The renewal of interest in learning began to fan a flame to read the Bible for themselves in their own languages. The great success of the reformation movement in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century was largely due to the translating and printing of the Bible in many languages and making it accessible to more people. England was no exception to this rule! They began to have a language of their own that was universal among them. This paved the way, along with the reformation spirit, to make attempts to translate the Bible into the English language.

### **FIRST EFFORTS IN ENGLISH**

1. In 1215 AD, **Orm** brought out a metrical version of parts of the Gospels and Acts.
2. In 1320 AD, **William of Shoreham** in Kent made a translation of the Psalms in the South part of England.
3. In 1340 AD, **Richard Rolle** made a translation of the Psalms in Northern England.

### **THE FIRST BIBLE IN ENGLISH**

In the church services of that time Latin was the language that the Bible would be read in to the people. John Wycliffe, who was a strong anti-papal reformer, desired greatly to put the Bible into the language of the people. It took him 22 years to do it. The New Testament was finished in 1382 and the Old Testament was finished in 1384. His translation helped to make the break with Rome eventually and also help to establish the English language. Some facts about this translation:

1. He used the Latin Vulgate to translate from.
2. It was only in a handwritten form (Printing came in 1456).
3. Many copies were made and placed in the hands of his “poor priest” to use to read to the people. It took about 10 months to make a copy. They were obviously expensive.
4. Some copies still exist today in spite of efforts that were made to completely destroy them.
5. In 1388, Richard Purney, with other scholars, made a revision of Wycliffe’s Bible. Several copies of this revision exist today.

Wycliffe’s efforts were greatly repressed by the religious hierarchy and they threatened to excommunicate anyone who translated the Bible into the English language or read any of these translations.

### **FIRST PRINTED BIBLE IN ENGLISH**

The Renaissance and the Reformation brought about the revolt against the chains that had kept men in spiritual slavery for so long. Also, printing had been invented and had been brought into England in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. parts of the Old Testament were printed in Hebrew as early as 1476. A great achievement was accomplished by Erasmus, a Greek Scholar, who brought out (published) his Greek New Testament at Basel in 1516. This made translating easier for scholars.

Using Erasmus’ Greek New Testament, William Tyndale made an English translation of the New Testament and had it printed in 1525 at Worms. Fifteen thousand copies were secretly brought into England because it was strongly opposed by the religious hierarchy. His translation was beautifully accurate for his time. He was an outstanding scholar that spoke seven languages fluently: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, and French. His translation has vastly influenced all future versions, especially the King James Version (estimated at 90%). He also translated the Pentateuch in 1530 and the book of Jonah in 1531 into English, but did not get to publish them. In 1534, he was imprisoned for a short period of time where he translated Joshua to 2 Chronicles. he was martyred on October 6, 1536. Miles Coverdale, a co-worker with

Tyndale, came out with a complete printed Bible in English in 1535, using Tyndale's works and his own efforts.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

It took several hundred years to get to this point of the first printed Bible in English, but it was a great milestone for the English speaking people. The next lesson will give a more detailed account of the works that led up to the Authorized King James version of the Bible.

Lesson Six

***“Translation That Led to the  
Authorized King James Version”***

With the works of Erasmus, Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Coverdale, the stage was set to solidify an England translation for the English speaking people. The Reformation movement in England was back and forth for a while—Protestants in power—then Catholics in power. This tended to make it dangerous to bring out a translation that had not been recognized and approved by the reigning power.

John Rogers, a close student of Tyndale’s, greatly desired to get the works of his friend published. He used the pen-name of “Thomas Matthew,” and dedicated this printed Bible to the King and Queen of England. King Henry VIII was persuaded to authorize its use in the churches in England. Orders were given to place it in every church building in England and make it so it can be read by all. It came out in 1537 and was called “Matthew’s Bible.” A pertinent observation was made: *“That which had been condemned before has now been authorized.”*

The marginal notes against Romanism made it unpopular with many. So, in 1539, Miles Coverdale was encouraged to bring out a revision of Matthew’s Bible and of his first edition (1535). It was called the “Great Bible” or the “Chained Bible,” because it was so large in size and was also chained to the pulpits of the churches in England.

In 1539, the “Tavener’s Bible” came out as a revision also of the “Matthew’s Bible.” The Greek scholarship in the New Testament portion was unusually good.

King Henry VIII, in later years, changed his mind and had the various versions of the Bible banned from circulation with the exception of the “Great Bible.” His successor was Edward VI who again encouraged the circulation of the Bibles for some seven years. Queen Mary came to the throne in 1553 and prohibited their circulation and burned people at the stake who did so. Queen Elizabeth in 1558 ended the tyranny and oppression and encouraged the circulation again of the Bibles.

The Geneva Bible had been translated and printed in Geneva by Bible Scholars who had fled to Geneva to escape death. The New Testament came out in 1557. The Old Testament came out in 1560. It was the first printed Bible put into verses. It was a small Bible. It went through 140 editions and was circulated very widely.

The Bishops in England were encouraged to bring out an edition of the Bible. It came out in 1568 and went through 20 editions. It superseded the “Great Bible” in the churches. It was well-done and scholarly.

## THE FIRST ROMAN CATHLIC ENGLISH BIBLE

Pressure was brought to bear upon the Catholic scholars to bring out their own translation of the Bible in English. The New Testament was published in 1582, and both the Old and New Testaments were printed by 1610. The Apocryphal books were included with this Bible. Their translation made use of the Latin Vulgate only and contained some gross errors as well as many ecclesiastical terms peculiar to the Catholic Church. A later revision was made by Challoner-Blyth in 1750.

## THE AUTHORIZED KING JAMES VERSION

The Puritans were not that happy with the “Great Bible” nor the “Bishops’ Bible.” King James I was persuaded upon their insistence to encourage and authorize another revision to be made into English for general use in England. An agreement was reached and fifty-four scholars were employed for the purpose. It was printed in 1611. Before publishing, it was to be reviewed by the Bishops of the Church of England and chief learned men. Afterwards, it was to be ratified by not only the Privy Council, but had to have Royal Authority behind it.

Four important rules among some fifteen that were to be employed by the translators are as follows:

1. The “Bishops’ Bible” was to be followed and as little altered as the truth of the original would permit.
2. The old ecclesiastical words to be retained.
3. No marginal notes except as an explanation for the Hebrew and Greek words.
4. When the other English Translations agreed better with the original text than the Bishops’ Bible, they were to be used.

General revisions followed in 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769. Most of this was the modernization of spelling, punctuation, correction of printing errors, etc. Other private revisions were made by individuals. The 1769 revision by Dr. Blaney is the edition used today as the “King James Version.”

Many factors have contributed to this version becoming the one version of the English speaking world for almost three hundred years. Even though some 70 private translations into English were brought out between 1611 and 1885, the King James Authorized Version had prevailed as supreme—the main version that people read, studied from, and preached from. The following facts may be of interest also:

**1250 AD**—Cardinal Hugo divided the Bible into Chapters for use of a Latin Concordance.

**1553 AD**—The Bible was divided into verses by Robert Stephens.

**1560 AD**—The Geneva Bible came out with: (a) The use of italics to indicate a supplied word; (b) The first Bible that was divided into Chapter and Verses; (c) The first Bible to omit the Apocryphal books; and (d) The first small, portable, and cheap Bible.



## Lesson Seven

## *“Major Revision Efforts Since the King James Version”*

Since 1611, there has been more than three hundred translations of the New Testament, in whole or in part, in the English language—and the number continues to grow. Why so many versions in English? Why not just one translation and let it serve the purpose for English speaking people? Probably one of the most obvious reasons for so many is that it is a free country and anyone who desires can bring out their own translation. Also, in some instances, money can be made if marketed well enough. But there are more legitimate reasons that can be given for so many translations. Following are some of the basic reasons given:

1. **New Discoveries.** Literally hundreds of Bible manuscripts, supplying significant information about the languages and text of the Bible, have been found since 1611. Some of these discoveries include: The Dead Sea Scrolls, 1947; The Papyri Mss. in Egypt, 1877; The Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus became available after 1611; and many others that have produced a wealth of lexical and grammatical aids, as well as checks on the text of the Bible. Translators today have more technical help than any previous group of scholars ever possessed. The King James Version was based on medieval copies of the Bible and did not have the wealth of aids that translators have today.
2. **Outdated Language.** Living languages change their meanings! After a while, they cease to communicate to a new generation. Words become archaic, lose their original meaning. Revisions are needed every so often to just update language.
3. **The Desire to Produce a More Accurate Translation.** With more and more Mss being found and with the growth of Biblical and Textual Scholarship, there is every reason to believe that a better, more accurate translation can be brought out. This reason probably accounts for the over one hundred English translations of the New Testament (and the Bible) in the last 75 years.
4. **The Desire to Produce an Easier Read Translation.** More and more efforts are being made to put the Bible in as simple a language as possible. The following illustrates the grade levels on which each Version communicates:

<b>Revised Standard Version</b>	11.3 grade level
<b>King James Version</b>	10.4 grade level
<b>New English Bible</b>	9.8 grade level
<b>American Standard Version</b>	9.7 grade level
<b>Today’s English Version</b>	8.2 grade level
<b>New International Version</b>	7.9 grade level

An illustration of an effort to simplify the language is the **Simple English Bible: New Testament** that was published in 1979 that is believed to be on an even lower grade level than the above.

Bible translating has been done by both individuals and groups of Bible Scholars. The King James Version was mostly the work of one man, William Tyndale. The Geneva Bible involved several Scholars in an effort to bring out an improved translation. yet, the King James Version had some fifty-four Scholars helping to evaluate the new revision.

## **ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS BROUGHT OUT BY A GROUP OF SCHOLARS**

The King James Version held its sway over the English speaking world for almost three centuries. Many individuals and small groups brought out revisions with the intent of updating the King James Version. An effort was made in 1856 in the Lower House of Convocation in England to bring about a major revision of the King James Version, but it failed. However, on February 10, 1870, it was brought up again and passed. The church of England took the lead in the management of the movement and a committee of sixteen men were appointed to carry out the resolution.

**THE REVISED VERSION (1881-1885).** Fifty-four Scholars were appointed on the revision committee, consisting mostly of Episcopalians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Unitarians. Text alterations, archaic word alterations, and better wording alterations were the key changes that were noticeable. Some minor changes in chapter headings, paragraphs, italics, and punctuation were also noticeable. An American contingent of Scholars agreed to work with the British Scholars to help promote its use in America. The New Testament was published in 1881 and the Old Testament in 1885.

**THE AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION (1901).** According to their agreement, the American committee that worked with the British committee did not bring out an American Version of the Revised Version for some fourteen years later. The major change was from the peculiar British words to American words, which had been placed in an index in the Revised Version. Textual changes were made in the light of the numerous new findings of Mss. that help to evaluate the existing Hebrew and Greek texts.

**THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1946-1952).** Thomas Nelson & Sons had copyrighted the American Standard Version to prevent any unauthorized changes being made in the translation. In 1928, they turned over the copyright to the International Council of Religious Education with the thought in mind of undertaking a revision, if it was thought necessary. In 1937, a vote by the body okayed the new revision and the task was begun. They were to revise the American Standard Version, but retain as much of the style of the King James Version as possible. The New Testament was completed in 1946 and the Old Testament in 1952. Its effort was to present the message of God in language that is *“direct and plain and meaningful to people today.”* This version was a good compromise between a word-for-word translation and a sense-for-sense translation.

**THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE (1961-1970).** This was to be a completely new translation into modern English by British Scholars for people in England. Its emphasis was placed upon it being for the private reading of individuals rather than public use in churches. It was based on what is called an **“Eclectic Text”**—that is, they did not use any one Greek Text, but the best Text that Scholarship had produced from various sources. It was a sense-for-sense translation. It would not be a good version for word studies.

**THE NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (1963).** This translation is a combination of revision and freshness. It is a revision of the American Standard Version of 1901, but using the latest manuscripts and Hebrew and Greek Texts. It was instigated by the Lockman Foundation.

They brought together an editorial board of linguists, Greek and Hebrew Scholars, ministers and consultants to do the translating. In addition to any corrections of the text and changes of archaic words, they were to make the translation in a fluent and readable style according to current English usage. The work is clear, straightforward in language with excellent marginal notes and references. It is suitable for general use by anyone seeking both accuracy and fluency.

**THE TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION (1966-1974).** This translation was brought out by Dr. Robert Bratcher, but scrutinized by a panel of specialists, and reviewed and approved by the Translation Committee of the American Bible Society. Dr. Bratcher made use of the Hebrew and Greek Texts produced by the United Bible Societies. It was put into modern speech. Weights, Measures, Currency, Hours are given in modern usages. The Version has a readable style and the distinct flavor of current speech. Its greatest advantage is in clarifying less readable passages in the older English Versions. It has undergone some revision in its later printed editions because of some strong objections to some passages (in particular from among Scholars of churches of Christ). It is primarily for the individual reader and not for reading in church services.

**THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (1973-1978).** The New York International Bible Society undertook the financial sponsorship of this project to bring out yet another new English Version. Over one hundred distinguished Scholars participated from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These Scholars came from various religious groups: Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, and other churches. The translation underwent three revision committees before it was published. No other version in history underwent a more thorough process of review and revision than this one. The goal was to have a version with clarity and literary quality so that it can be used both privately and publicly. In order to make use of the most modern finds of Mss and textual criticism efforts, the translators used an "Eclectic Text." The new text underwent three revisions before being used by the translators. This is a high quality work but it has had its problems in spite of such.

**ENGLISH VERSIONS PUT OUT BY CATHOLIC SCHOLARS.** After the Douai-Rheims Version was brought out by Catholic Scholars in 1582-1610, there was little done by them for quite some time. Challoner and Blyth brought out a revision in 1750. It wasn't until 1941-1952 that a major effort was made to bring out a new revision called **THE CONFRATERNITY BIBLE**. The latest joint effort in France that was later translated into English has been **THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE**, 1966.

**THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION (1979-1982).** In 1970s, Thomas Nelson & Sons called selected Scholars together to evaluate the need of a revision of the fourth edition of the King James Version. One hundred and thirty Bible Scholars and others were employed in this task. The New Testament was completed in 1979 and the Old Testament in 1982. Their efforts were to retain everything possible of the text and language of its original and subsequent versions. It was to make use of the best text available in Hebrew and Greek. They were to keep the familiar words of the King James Version as much as possible and update archaic words and phrases. They were to keep the flow of thought established by earlier editions so that reading from one and following in the other would be made easier. This is reputed to be a monumental work of conservative Scholarship.

**THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION.** This has been recently published and is a revision of the old Revised Standard Version of 1952. It is reputed to be a more conservative work than its counter part. We should be hearing more about it in the future.

This is by no means all of the new versions that have come out since the King James Version, but these are the better known ones. An additional chapter should be added to this book in the near future to update and deal with some of the better versions that are of more recent origin.

### **ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS BROUGHT OUT BY INDIVIDUALS**

In contrast to groups of Scholars being used to translate and check up on one another's translation before publishing, individual translators are usually the work of one man. He may be a Bible Scholar in his own right, but without the proper checks placed upon him by fifty or one hundred other Scholars, the likelihood is that his work may be more flawed than the group translations.

Actually, the first efforts to translate the Bible were done by individuals. William Tyndale's work has probably affected more versions of the Bible than any other—and his version was an individual effort. Most of the over three hundred versions in English would be made up of individual translations. Some of the better known are listed below:

- |  |      |                                   |      |
|--|------|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1. Living Oracles (New Testament)                    | 1826 | 8. Berkeley Version               | 1945 |
| 2. Weymouth's New Testament                          | 1903 | 9. C. B. William's New Testament  | 1937 |
| 3. Goodspeed's New Testament                         | 1923 | 10. J. B. Phillip's New Testament | 1958 |
| 4. Riverside's New Testament                         | 1923 | 11. The Amplified Bible           | 1958 |
| 5. Montgomery's New Testament                        | 1924 | 12. Berkeley Revision             | 1959 |
| 6. Moffatt's Bible                                   | 1924 | 13. Kenneth Taylor's Living Bible | 1971 |
| 7. Goodspeed's New Testament & Smith's Old Testament | 1931 |                                   |      |

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

We are living in an age of many versions of the Bible in English. We cannot change it, but we can adapt to our situation and make the best of it. An obvious fact is that there will always be a need of updating the language of versions every 30-50 years. But there will also be continued efforts to try to simplify the Bible into the language of the common people. Obviously, the challenge is great on the part of translators to do this without changing the message of the Word of God.

An effort has been made by our brethren in Texas to bring out **THE SIMPLE ENGLISH BIBLE (New Testament) (1978)**. Its purpose was two-fold:

- 1) To provide a translation in simple language that would be easier understood by the masses of English speaking people;
- 2) To provide an easy tool for translating into other languages of the world. Since it is estimated that there are still over 2000 languages that have no part of the Bible as of yet.

Hopefully, this can serve as a great tool to accomplish the needed translations in all of these nations of people. Their efforts thus far have been very helpful to our missionaries in countries where a translation was needed or a revision was needed.

**Lesson Eight**

***“Translators’ Challenge:  
To Find a Proper Hebrew and Greek Text”***

It is important again to emphasize that we do not have the inspired “original manuscripts” of the Old and New Testaments. We only have copies of copies of copies, etc., of the originals. However, that does not mean we have a perverted Bible. Scholars estimate that the texts of the Bible are 98% accurate (especially of the New Testament). The remaining 2% have doubts raised because of the variations in manuscripts. But even these do not affect what we refer to as “doctrinal” teaching that is not clearly taught elsewhere in the Bible. An illustration of this accuracy can be seen in Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:15-16 where his reasoning was based on the difference between the singular “seed” and not the plural. Also, the findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls helped to give great assurance of the accuracies of the Old Testament manuscripts. But an important fact that must not go unnoticed is that neither Jesus, nor the Apostles, called attention to the “incorrect copies” of the Old Testament manuscripts or the incorrect Greek translation (LXX) of the Old Testament.

One of the problems that the average individual has is that he cannot read Hebrew and Greek with understanding. Thus, we have to depend upon English translators. Today, there are over three hundred English Versions of the Old and/or New Testaments. We are dependent upon their accuracy to know what God has said in His Word to man. To set our minds at ease again, the words of Alexander Campbell illustrate the outlook of Scholars in regards to all translations: *“I have never seen a translation of the Bible in any language yet from which a man could not learn the truth if he were of a mind to do so.”* Even though this statement was made a hundred and fifty years ago or more, it is still the sentiment of Bible Scholars today. The only problem that we have is that some translations require more effort than others to arrive at truth.

One of the reasons why most of us feel inadequate in choosing a translation to be used is our lack of knowledge of the translating processes that are involved. The purpose of this lesson is to expose the reader to one of these challenges that they face.

**THE TRANSLATOR IS NOT INSPIRED**

An Italian proverb says, *“The translator is a traitor.”* While we can see that this can be a very great possibility in the general affairs of men, we would doubt very seriously that such could be said of those who translate the Bible. And yet, an honest translator is bound to confess that something is lost, changed, in the course of translation. Probably the Bible suffers less in translation than any other work. But no Bible translator counts himself as a perfect translator. The reason—the translator is not “Inspired of God!” The original autographs were (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)! There is no such thing as an “Inspired translator” nor an “Inspired translation!” To say that any translation of the Bible is inspired is certainly erroneous, but this does not take away from the fact that the Bible was Inspired of God when first given. Because translators are not Inspired, this will explain some of the differences we find in our English translations when compared with each other.

Translating the Bible unfortunately involves more than just taking words and thoughts from one language and putting them into another—and even this is no picnic in itself! There are major challenges that translators of the Bible face that must be dealt with in order to give us as close as humanly possible the “Word of God” as originally given by God.

### **THE CHALLENGE TO USE THE BEST HEBREW & GREEK TEXTS**

The reason why this is such a challenge to translators is that it hasn’t been all that simple to arrive at an “original” Hebrew and Greek texts by Scholars. It has been, and continues to be, a very painstaking, time consuming, Scholarly evaluation by individuals and groups, in order to arrive at the best texts possible from which to translate.

The process involved in arriving at what is considered the “original” text of any literary work is referred to as **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**. If printing had been practiced since man’s first writings, there would have been less need for such a science. The reason should be obvious—once a printed copy of an “original” could be made, it would then be just a matter of continually printing from that print set-up. Since we do not have original manuscripts of the Bible, we have to turn to copies of existing Mss. and try to recover the true form as it was first given by Inspiration of God. What makes this work hard is that man is frail, mistakes are made, and the copies will have many variations within them. In addition to this, the Bible has thousands of manuscripts to be examined and compared with each other. It is an enormous job just to examine and record the available evidence, much less to try to examine all the evidence in order to make a decision as to which variation is to be rejected and which is to be considered correct. Such decision making requires an almost “superhuman degree of knowledge and judgment.”

Efforts to arrive at an acceptable Greek text can illustrate some of the processes and efforts involved in the process:

**THE RECEIVED TEXT.** The first printed Greek text was brought out by Erasmus in 1516. It underwent several editions and some revision over the years. Stephens published four editions of a Greek text during 1546-1551. Beza published nine editions of the Greek New Testament from 1565-1604. The Elzevir brothers published seven editions of the Greek text from 1624-1678. This became the “standard” text for continental Europe. It is referred to as the “Received Text” or the “Textus Receptus.” This was based on Stephens’ third edition in 1550 and the Elzevir’s second edition of 1633. This text is not a bad text or misleading text either theologically or practically. Technically, it is far from the original text from all the evidence that has been amassed since 1633.

**THE LATEST CRITICAL TEXT.** With the hundreds of Mss. coming to light, there has been an effort to re-evaluate the “Textus Receptus.” Many differences were coming to light in comparison of these Mss. For almost three centuries there has been an effort to replace the hastily assembled text of earlier years with a more accurate text.

- 1) **Efforts made from 1830-1882.** Karl Lackmann came out with the first real effort of a critical text in 1831 and a second edition in 1842-50. Tregellas came out with his critical text in 1857-1879. Tischendorf, one of the best known Scholars in New Testament Criticism published twenty-one texts of older Mss. and twenty other Mss. to make them

more accessible to Scholars. He then brought out eight editions of his Greek New Testament from 1841 to 1872. The eighth edition had a critical apparatus that has not been equaled in citation of Greek Mss., Versions, or Patristic writings. Then, in 1881-1882, Westcott and Hort brought out their edition of the Greek New Testament. They made their text available to the Revisers of 1881 (The English Revised New Testament) that affected the translating of the Old American Standard Version of 1901. Their text finally replaced the "Textus Receptus" as the better text of the New Testament.

- 2) **Efforts since 1882.** Nestle came out with his Greek text of the New Testament in 1898 and it underwent some twenty-five editions up to 1963. His text was based on the work of Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and Weiss. The first group effort at a Greek text was begun in 1955 by several Bible Societies combining their efforts. Efforts are still in process to continually update our Hebrew and Greek texts to be as accurate as humanly possible. One of the definite advantages of a more recent translation of the Bible is that its text is a more accurate text from which to translate.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Because of being ignorant of the part that so many have played in producing an up to date English Bible, we tend to be easily misled into believing erroneous things about our many and good translations. We hope that we can be more appreciative of some many that have spent so much time to make the Bible not only accessible to us, but more readable and understandable. The next lesson will cover another area of challenge to the translator.



Lesson Nine

## ***“Translator’s Challenge: To Have Adequate Knowledge of Hebrew & Greek”***

The translating of thought from one language to another is not a simple matter of finding a word that exactly corresponds in meaning and in each instance where the word occurs to render it by that same word in the new language. This “school-boy” approach to the translating of the Bible can lead to gross error. It is wrong to assume that each Hebrew or Greek word should be translated by the same English word in every instance where it appears. And this is only the beginning of what is involved in accurately translating the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English.

### **METHODS OF APPROACH**

The method to use in translating is also involved in this challenge. At least three basic approaches have been used by translators:

1. **A literal method.** This is where you have an exact English word directly connected with the Hebrew or Greek word in what is referred to as a “word for word” translation. A Hebrew or Greek Interlinear is a true “word for word” translation. Below is an example to illustrate:

*“In beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards the God, and God was the Word. This was in beginning towards the God. Everything through him became, and apart-from him became not-even one-thing. What has-become in him life was, and the life was the light of-the men. And the light in the darkness shines, and the darkness it not overcame.”*

This is not the way we talk in English. Also, this does not faithfully represent the writer’s meaning. The job of the translator is to produce the same effect on readers of the translation as the original text produced on those able to read it.

2. **A standard method.** This is what is often referred to as a “meaning for meaning” or “sense for sense” translation. It is to convey the same meaning to English readers that the Hebrew and Greek conveyed to its original readers. These translations will vary from what is called “Conservative” or “Liberal.” The Conservative efforts will attempt to stay closer to the original language, but not a literal or word for word translation. The Liberal efforts will feel free to add words or thoughts when felt necessary to give the complete or full sense of the original languages. possibly two better terms could be used to identify these two “standard” approaches: (1) A Modified-Literal translation, and (2) An Idiomatic translation. These will be illustrated after discussing the next method.
3. **A paraphrase method.** This approach is to give the general sense of the Hebrew or Greek in as many words as are necessary. These translations tend to be more like “commentaries” rather than translations. It is here that there is more of a danger of perversion taking place through allowing one’s religious prejudices to be interjected. This is one of the main

reasons why efforts have been made to have translating committees made up of a group of Scholars from various religious backgrounds in order to help keep those religious biases out. Often-times, the “standard method” and the “paraphrase method” will be very close to identifying with each other.

### AN EXAMPLE TO ILLUSTRATE

Below is an example of how 1 Corinthians 16:20 is translated by the different approaches:

- 1) *“Salute you the brethren all salute you one another with a kiss holy.”* (Greek – Literal)
- 2) *“All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.”* (KJV – Modified Literal)
- 3) *“Greetings from all the brothers. Greet one another with a kiss of peace.”* (NEB – Idiomatic).
- 4) *“All the Christians here send greetings. I should like you to shake hands all round as a sign of Christian love.”* (Phillips – Free or Paraphrase)

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We often use the expression: *“There is safety in numbers!”* And in some instances it can be certainly true. When it comes to translating the Bible, you would think that this would be a true statement when a large number of Scholars are involved in the process. I believe that this is generally true, but from experience we have seen that this is not a guarantee of freedom from erroneous translating. The **Today’s English Version** and the **New International Version** have both been criticized for allowing their religious prejudices to end into their work.

I have personally made use of all the above types in my studies. Often, one translation can give better insight to what the Scriptures are saying than another. It is a wise person that is able to learn from the experiences of another to become a more knowledgeable person in the Scriptures.

Lesson Ten

***“Translator’s Challenge: To Translate the Bible  
In Suitable English Style”***

Some styles of writing are more desirable than others—depending upon who you are and what you may stand for. We often use special language for important letters or documents, while we may use a quite different style in writing a letter to a friend, relative or a mate. Some books written by men are more popular than others. Part of that popularity is in his/her style of writing. The King James Version was able to keep the English speaking world holding on to this translation for a long time and one of the primary reasons is its style of language used. It not only was suitable language, but it was dignified—yet simple and direct. It reads like it should—because it is a message from God to man. Even the use of “Thee” and “Thou” has carried with it an elevating of the language style. However, this version has never been as easy to understand as some later versions have been. And the older the version becomes, the harder it becomes for people to understand because language style changes. This is one of the reasons for revisions of the translations of the Bible, not only in English, but other languages as well.

One of the objections to a few of the more recent versions is over language style. Some of these have made the Bible so much easier to read for the beginner, but it has gotten too loose in its style of expressing itself in a dignified way. Objections came very quickly to the **Today’s English Version: New Testament** because of its crude way of expressing some things. An example is found in Acts 8:20:

- 1) KJV—***“Thy money perish with thee.”***
- 2) TEV—***“Your money go to hell with you.”***

This is graphic, straight-forward language, but rather a crude way to express it. Many feel that this detracts from the Bible rather than upholding its dignity.

Another contrast can help to illustrate the value of up-to-date language over the old style used in the King James Version, and yet it is still in a dignified form.

- 1) KJV—***“Mark those which cause divisions.”***
- 2) TEV—***“Take note of those who create dissensions.”***
- 3) NASV—***“Keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching....”***

The Bible needs to be translated into clear, simple, understandable language for it to have its desired effect upon its readers. In the language of one writer who appreciated this fact, *“Thank God for a Simple Bible.”* He illustrated his point with the question of a Lawyer asking Jesus what he meant by “Neighbor” (Luke 10:29). What if Jesus’ answer had been given as follows:

“A Neighbor (thereinafter referred to as the party of the first part) is to be construed as meaning a person of Jewish descent whose legal residence is within a radius of no more than three statute miles from one’s own legal residence. Unless there is another person of

Jewish descent (hereinafter referred to as the part of the second part) living closer to the party of the first part than one is oneself, in which case the party of the first part is to be construed as neighbor to the party of the second part and one is oneself relieved of all responsibility of any kind or sort whatsoever.”

We should be thankful that the Bible is in simple language in comparison to the above! In the first place, God gave the Bible in the “Koine” Greek language—the language of the common people. He wanted us to be able to understand clearly what He has given to us for our eternal good (Ephesians 3:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). And this seems to be the recognition of the more recent versions striving to make it the language of the common people.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

A suggested exercise for class or personal benefit would be to have some of these different versions to compare like we have done briefly in this lesson. We need to be able to take advantage of the advances that are being made in trying to make our English Bible both as correct as possible, but put into language that we can easily understand. This has been helpful to me personally for years. One of the books in my library is a New Testament that compares 27 different versions.

While these three lessons on the Translator’s Challenges have not dealt with nearly all of, nor some of the hard, challenges that translators face, we have none-the-less hopefully exposed the reader to some of the critical challenges faced by these Scholarly men who have spent much time and effort to produce a Bible in the English language that is both as correct as possible, but in a language that we can understand easier.

Lesson Eleven

***“Suggested Strengths & Weaknesses  
Of Our English Versions” (#1)***

The accuracy of our English Versions of the Bible needs to be kept uppermost in any discussion about the Bible. We need to realize that the present Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible are believed to be at least 98% accurate. The other 2% is being worked at by Scholars to make it as close to 100% accuracy. It is also to be remembered that even the small percentage (that there are questions about) do not pose a problem for us because of the way God has given His Revelation to man. Instead of giving us one book called the New Testament, He has given us twenty-seven books so that the truths can be stated over and over throughout.

However, there is another problem that needs to be guarded against—translations of the Bible must be as accurate as possible also. When comparing them, it becomes evident that there are differences. Some of these differences would be of more importance than others. This is the reason for this lesson—to help show up these differences and their relative importance. These differences may occur for several reasons:

- 1) The Hebrew and Greek Texts used to translate from would make a difference. This is especially seen in comparing the King James Version with one of the latest versions.
- 2) How old the version is would determine how many archaic (out-of-date) words some will have. Since language changes over a period of years, it is natural to have “out-of-date” words to contend with in older versions.
- 3) Whether translators believe in the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible could make some difference, especially if it is a questionable passage or text.
- 4) Whether the translation was done by one person or by a committee of people could make some difference as well. The KJV, ERV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NASB, NKJV, and NRSV are all done by a group of Scholars usually from differing religious backgrounds. Versions like the **LIVING BIBLE** and **THE TODAY’S ENGLISH VERSION** were done by one person primarily (even though they had advisers).

Again we need to repeat, that in spite of these differences, it is possible that God’s truth can be learned from any English version of the Bible in spite of “doctrinal errors” that may be found in them. Naturally, it is more desirable to have a version that has no errors in it, but this is being a little unrealistic. To claim that a certain version has no errors contained within it is to either be ignorant of the facts or ignore the facts. No translation is perfect. However, some are better than others as far as accuracy and read-ability is concerned. The wise thing to do would be to have more than one version for comparison purposes.

It is important to realize also that we do not have a **perfect** Hebrew or Greek text! As well, we do not have a **perfect** translation of the Bible! All translations have been made by uninspired men and have mistakes in them. Almost every translation that we have access to have

come from the hands of denominational translators who differ in “doctrinal” understanding. God has not guaranteed immunity from error to these people. All translations have strengths and weaknesses.

It is also important to realize that a person may make use of a modern translation and not be a false teacher. Neither will using such make him an advocate of false doctrine that the version may contain in it. People have been using the King James Version for hundreds of years with all of its errors and mistakes. But what we have done is to help people see those errors and not accept them as God’s truth. The same thing needs to be done with the newer versions as well. The real issue is not to bind my opinion on others as to which version everyone **must use**. All versions have problems—some worse than others—and study must be involved with all. Some strongly feel that they had rather wrestle with a few errors in a version than to have to wrestle with hard to understand language in an older version.

An effort will be made in this lesson to try to evaluate some of the most widely used English versions and to point out some of their strengths and weaknesses.

### **THE KING JAMES VERSION (1611)**

#### **Strengths:**

1. Its language is beautiful, dignified, and a readable style to those who are familiar with it (ages 65 & older).
2. It has always been looked upon as a fairly accurate version with few glaring errors.
3. The 1611 edition has undergone some four revisions, and the one that is presently used is the edition of 1769 by a Dr. Blaney.
4. The wide spread use of the KJV over a long period of time has enhanced its value to those who love the Bible, which causes reluctance to give it up to a newer version.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. The greatest weakness that is obvious to most people who read the KJV is its obsolete and archaic words. One man came up with 2300 archaic words and phrases. At least 500 are listed in some pew Bibles. Some of the better known ones are: “Let” for “hinder;” “Prevent” for “Precede;” “Conversation” for “Conduct;” and “Ghost” for “Spirit.”
2. For those unfamiliar with the wording of the KJV, the language is harder to understand than it is for the modern versions. The success of the newer versions indicates this fact.
3. The question of “doctrinal errors” in the KJV is both denied and advocated by those discussing the versions. It would seem that the problem may be in determining what is “doctrinal error” before such could be shown and accepted. But, errors are in this version of the Bible! The following are some of the better known errors that have to be explained to Bible students:
  - a) Acts 12:4—“Easter” should be “Passover.”
  - b) Acts 2:31—“Hell” should be “Hades.” The KJV translators make no distinction between “Gehenna,” “Hades,” and “Tartarus.”
  - c) 1 John 3:9—This and similar passages do not give the continuing nature of the verb and leads to a misunderstanding of God’s Word.
  - d) John 3:34—“Unto him” is not in the original Greek and is misleading.

- e) 1 Corinthians 14:2—"Unknown" is not in the original Greek and has been very misleading to the casual reader of the Bible.
  - f) 1 Corinthians 13:10—"Perfect" is a poor translation here—It should be "complete."
  - g) 1 John 5:7—From the evidence, this is an addition to the original text.
  - h) Matthew 28:1—"In the end of the Sabbath" should read "After the Sabbath."
  - i) Revelation 3:14—"Beginning of the creation of God" has led to false teachings about the Deity of Christ.
4. Since the KJV was primarily translated by Calvinists, the bias of their positions is shown in many places: Positions of Authority stressed; Predestination stressed; Inability to fall from grace stressed, etc.

**Observations:**

1. A grave problem that must be dealt with is in thinking of the King James Version as the standard of Authority, rather than the Greek text. For some people, the very defects in the KJV have become "sacred," and any attempt to recapture more accurately the meaning of the original writings is viewed as "altering and amending the very word of God!" In some cases, people have been accustomed to reading their dogma into a particular version. A change in language seems to threaten their dogma, and they react violently. The only possible standard of measurement is the corrected Greek text.
2. A person must be very careful not to knowingly misrepresent the message that a version bears. One should be careful not to discourage the reading of God's Word in whatever version since we do not want to cause a person to be lost!

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

This is not the end, but just the beginning of the study on strengths and weaknesses of our English Versions. Two more lessons will follow this one—so read on!

Lesson Twelve

***“Suggested Strengths & Weaknesses  
Of Our English Versions” (#2)***

No English Version of the Bible is perfect because it has been translated by fallible men who can make mistakes. But to their credit, we believe that in the main they have sincerely tried to bring out the best translation possible. We need to be grateful, for not only the way that God has given us His Word, but that men have wanted to translate His Word for us into our language in a way that we can understand it.

We continue now to look at the strengths and weaknesses of several of the main versions that have been made available to English speaking people.

**THE AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION (1901)**

**Strengths:**

1. The ASV is an American updating of the English Revised Version of 1881-1885. It was designed to change the British words to American words primarily.
2. This version is based on a more accurate Hebrew & Greek texts. Some 5000 textual changes are made from the KJV. These changes are of no great concern since they deal with mostly insignificant changes in the texts.
3. Many of the misleading archaisms were eliminated. Not all, but most of them.
4. They tried to use the same English word to translate the Greek word as much as was consistent with the context.
5. It is an extremely accurate version—staying as close to a word-for-word translation as possible. For this reason it lost some of the beauty and style of the KJV and does not flow as smooth in reading.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Because of its age, its words are becoming obsolete to the younger generation.
2. “Strong in the Greek, but weak in English,” were the words of Spurgeon.
3. Later Mss. finds, etc., would leave it a little weak in accuracy as the later versions would be. But it is better than the KJV in this respect.
4. New Archaisms were created by this version that need to be replaced.
5. Misleading translations that leave questions in the mind of the reader, such as 1 Corinthians 15:19; Acts 17:3, etc.

**THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1945-52)**

**Strengths:**

1. It has done a commendable job of putting the ASV into modern English at the time it was translated. For the most part, the language is smooth and well-expressed, and will help the reader to grasp the ideas better.
2. It has attempted to re-capture the style of the KJV, but attempting to remove all archaic words.



3. Some improvements have been made in the texts since the ASV to make it more accurate. They used the newer “Critical Text” rather than “Textus Receptus.”
4. When used along with the KJV or the ASV, it will be a great help with not only archaic words, but words that some people are not familiar with.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Some of the changes made by translators has caused no little concern by Bible Scholars, such as: Isaiah 7:14; Genesis 12:3; Genesis 9:20 when compared to Genesis 4:2; John 3:16, 18; Ephesians 1:1; Matthew 19:28, etc.
2. Dropping sections of Scripture, such as: Mark 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11, etc. In some editions, these have been put back into the main text, but with a footnote about them.
3. Failing to revise Matthew 6:9-13.
4. Retaining the “Thee” and “Thou” only with use with Deity, but putting “you” with reference to Jesus (Matthew 16:16, etc.).
5. Making sentence flow smoothly by adding words, but do not indicate such by italicizing the added word.
6. Using “faith only” in Romans 11:20.

It is important to realize that this version will have to be studied out and be sure to point out the places where it is weak or has made unwarranted changes. While it has a value, it may not be wise to use it as the only version that one reads.

**THE LIVING BIBLE PARAPHRASE**

It would be best to avoid this version as a study Bible, but only to be used as you would a commentary on the Bible. It has some value in this regard, but has too many problems to deal with by a person wanting to learn the truth of the Bible by just reading this version alone.

**THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE (1961-1970)**

**Strengths:**

1. It makes use of the best text available at the time of translating.
2. It uses the word, “Messiah” rather than “Christ” to help make an identity with the Old Testament word.
3. It makes clarifications of phrases that were not clear, such as: “*You shall not kill*” was changed to “*You shall not murder.*”
4. It is a very readable version with improved understanding (Matthew 6:13; 1 Timothy 5:23, etc.)
5. While it is not a word-for-word translation, it does try to give the English equivalent of each Hebrew or Greek word. It is more of a meaning-for-meaning translation which makes it easier to read.
6. It is specifically stated that this is more for the private reader, not for public use in churches. It is a completely new translation.

**Weaknesses:**

1. It was a translation for people in England. It will have many oddities of British phrases (Luke 15:14; 2 Timothy 4:16, etc.)
2. Archaic forms were retained in the Psalms and in Prayers.

3. A large list of words unknown to Americans has to be made: (Matthew 20:31; Mark 12:15, etc.).
4. It is not useful for special word studies because of its inconsistent use of words to translate.
5. There is a considerable re-arrangement of the text of the Old Testament.
6. There are quite a few problem passages:
  - a) Matthew 16:18—"You are Peter, the rock."
  - b) Acts 20:7—"on Saturday night"
  - c) Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:15—"guardian angel"
  - d) 1 Corinthians 16:8—"Whitsuntide"
  - e) Acts 10:46; 1 Corinthians 13:8—"tongues of ecstasy"
  - f) Romans 16:1—"Phoebe, an office holder"
7. There is a failure to make Old Testament and New Testament passages harmonize (Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:18).
8. Changes that are uncalled-for: (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:11; Luke 1:27; Matthew 1:23; 1 Peter 2:24, etc.).

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

There will be one more lesson dealing with the Strengths and Weaknesses of our main English Versions. I hope that you can see by comparing these works, even in a brief way, helps to evaluate the usability of this versions.

**Lesson Thirteen**

***“Suggested Strengths & Weaknesses  
Of Our English Versions” (#3)***

We continue with looking at the major English Versions and their various strengths and weaknesses. We are blessed so greatly in this country with access to not just one version, but many versions of the Bible; as well as, having it in our own tongue wherein we were born! What we want to do is expose the reader to a little bit about all of the major versions to give an idea what to look for as he may use one or more of them. Most of what you will be given will be what many in the church have recognized about them.

**THE NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (1960-1971)**

**Strengths:**

1. It is a reworking and bringing up to date the old ASV (1901).
2. It is believed to be a distinct improvement in some areas.
  - a) A dignified translation.
  - b) True to the original languages generally.
  - c) Grammatically correct.
  - d) More understandable to the masses.
  - e) Gives due reverence to Christ.
  - f) Tries to give the full impact of Greek tenses.
  - g) Special effort to indicate when questions expect a “no” answer: (1 Corinthians 12:29-30)
3. “Thee” and “Thou” changed to “you,” except in prayers to Deity.
4. Italics are used for words not in the original.
5. Old Testament quotes in small capitals.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Some of the first editions evidently had some things that were objected to, but have been changed since then in later editions.
2. By bringing the ASV up to date and putting the language into modern speech, there may be places where some religious bias has crept in to be watched for.

**NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (1961-1970)**

**Strengths:**

1. It is a very readable translation with many good qualities.
2. Meanings are clearly expressed where before there were some questions.
3. Footnotes give alternate readings where there is a question as to which should be in the text.
4. The NIV tried to follow pretty much the same textual base as the ASV.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Some religious bias seems to have come through the translation:
  - a) Romans 1:16—“**faith alone**” (this has been changed in later editions).
  - b) Romans 7:18—“**sinful nature**”
  - c) **etc.**
2. Failure to distinguish between Gehenna and Hades in all places: Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27; Matthew 11:23; 16:19.
3. Some of the objections given against this version earlier has brought about some changes for the better.
4. Passages still objected to: Psalm 51:5; Romans 2:4, etc.

**TODAY’S ENGLISH VERSION (1966-1974)  
(Good News For Modern Man)**

**Strengths:**

1. Simple language but a limited vocabulary.
2. It was produced cheaply and widely circulated for the masses of people.
3. Made use of the latest findings in the Hebrew and Greek Mss.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Language may be too simple to adequately translate the Hebrew and Greek.
2. It is basically a “One Man Translation” which makes it suspect.
3. Some changes made that are questionable:
  - a) Words omitted that are in the Greek text.
  - b) Words added that are not in the Greek text and not noted.
  - c) Changes the word “blood” to “death.” (Acts 20:28; Romans 5:9, etc.)
4. Changes that are objectionable:
  - a) Romans 1:17—“**faith alone.**”
  - b) Acts 20:7—“**Saturday night**” “**Fellowship mean.**”
  - c) Matthew 16:18—“**Peter, the rock.**”
5. Crudeness of language: (Acts 8:20, etc.)

**THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION (1979-1982)**

**Strengths:**

1. Definitely upgrades antiquated words of the old KJV.
2. Upgrades grammatical forms...modernizes them.
3. Retains the majesty & beauty of KJV.
4. Faithful to the familiar word structure.
5. Can easily follow when comparing with the KJV.
6. Retains everything possible of the text and language of the KJV.
7. Highest standards of accuracy, readability, and beauty.
8. They dropped the “eth” endings and the “Thee” and “Thou.”
9. Italics are used.
10. Footnote system to note changes in Mss.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Nothing to suggest at this point—still evaluating.

**NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1990)**

**Strengths:**

1. They have eliminated any archaic words or expressions.
2. Greater accuracy and smoothness of language over the RSV.
3. Eliminated Masculine-oriented language as much as possible, where it involves both male and female. Male image of Deity retained.
4. It is “as literal as possible, and as free as necessary.”
5. Retained some textual readings that the RSV placed in footnotes: (Matthew 12:47; 21:44; Luke 22:19b, 20; 24:40; etc).
6. All “Thee,” “Thou,” “est,” “eth” are gone.
7. Put “Messiah” for “Christos” in the New Testament.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Retained the Apocrypha in most of their Bibles. (You can secure one without them).
2. places that there are still questions about: Isaiah 7:14; Psalm 51:5; Daniel 4:27; John 3:16; Romans 11:20; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6; etc.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

It is obvious to one who is somewhat acquainted with the various versions that this lesson only touches the “hem of the garment.” But, just from this brief study it should be obvious that Scholars are seeing the value of coming back to a closer effort to translate the Bible as close to the original as possible.

When comparing versions, it becomes obvious that some are better than others for various reasons. This is the reason why more than one version is good to have in your home. Also, if you like to read from a modern version, be sure you have access to an older version for comparison purposes.

The unique thing about the Bible is that a person can learn the Truth from any of these translations if he will study them carefully. The Bible has a way of explaining, defending, and correcting itself even when men do not do the best job of translating.





