

## History of the Bible

When the Bible was originally revealed and inspired, the writers presented what God had communicated to them in their common language.

### The Original Language of the Bible

The original biblical texts were written in three human languages: *Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek*. God did not give the Bible to human agents in a foreign dialect. He communicated with them in the common language of those He was inspiring to write. Later, the original texts were translated into English. Scribes copied the Old Testament scrolls onto parchment or animal hides, and later into books. Several copies of the Old Testament have been found that date around AD 900. These were produced by Masoretes who used eight precise rules to keep from error.

1. the whole scroll must be carefully ruled before a word is written
2. the ink must be black, made from soot, charcoal and honey
3. each line is to contain 30 letters exactly
4. each column is to contain an even number of lines, the same number throughout the scroll
5. no letter or word is to be written from memory
6. each word must be studied in the original manuscript and spoken aloud before being copied
7. the document is to be carefully checked using word and letter counts
8. the entire scroll is to be checked by a supervisor

The translation of these three languages presented the same challenge as any transcription from one language to another. All three original biblical languages have words and phrases that are unique and require interpretation. Some words, phrases, and ideas are unique to the time of reference and the common language of that period. Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are no different from any other language in this. They must be analyzed and translated to be properly understood. What can be said in one language may be said in any language, but the manner of doing so varies from one language to another. The original languages of the Bible were not supernaturally shaped, they were developed over a period of time. The original language offers hundreds of words and phrases that are not clear in modern language and must be properly translated by the context of the scripture.

### Hebrew and Aramaic are members of the Semitic language group.

Shem was the oldest son of Noah, (Genesis 10:21). Hebrew was the language of Canaan and the Jews. Around 600 B.C. Aramaic began to be the spoken language of the Israelite people. Several portions of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, (Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-16; Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:46-7:28). In Daniel 5 - “*mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*” are Aramaic. Aramaic became the dominant language of the Jewish people after they were taken into Babylonian

captivity and in the New Testament period.

[Greek is a part of the Indo-European language group.](#)

The Greek language group includes twenty ancient dialects.

[Septuagint, LXX](#)

The Septuagint, commonly designated LXX, is the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament of the Bible. The title LXX or "seventy" refers to the tradition that it was the work of 70 or 72 translators. The translation was made from the Hebrew Bible by Hellenistic Jews during the period 275 - 100 BC at Alexandria. The Septuagint was heavily influenced by the Hebrew it translated. It provided information on the meaning of Hebrew words at the time of translation. Jews stopped using it about 70 A.D. due to its being used by Christians. Ancient manuscripts from Qumran suggest that the Septuagint often followed a Hebrew text that was different from the current authoritative Hebrew text. Thus its value for textual examination has been enhanced. The Septuagint provides an understanding of the cultural and intellectual settings of Hellenistic Judaism.

[Latin was the language of the Romans, and was used throughout its military activities.](#)

The influence of Latin on New Testament writing was limited to vocabulary that was associated with Roman relations with Palestine. The four dominant languages that were in use at the time of Christ were: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin.

[Latin Vulgate](#)

The Latin Vulgate was pronounced "*authentic*" by the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, 1545 to 1563.

The Council of Trent convened to examine and condemn the teaching of *Martin Luther* and *Protestant reformers*. The title "*Vulgate*" was originally given to the "*Common Edition*" of the Greek Septuagint that was used by the early Church Fathers. The title was transferred to the ***Old Latin version*** of both the Old and New Testament that was used in the first centuries of the Western church. The present **Vulgate** is the work of St. Jerome, a Doctor of the Roman Church. At first, St. Jerome used the Greek Septuagint for his Old Testament translation, including parts of the Apocrypha. Later he consulted original Hebrew texts. After the original translation, the Vulgate went through several revisions that became less accurate over the next 12 centuries. A modern reworking of the Vulgate was largely completed in 1977.

[Versions of the Bible](#)

A Version is a translation of the Holy Scriptures. The versions are important helps to the correct interpretation.

## The Targums

After their return from the captivity in Babylon, the Jews were no longer familiar with the old Hebrew. This required that their Scriptures should be translated for them into the Chaldaic or Aramaic language and interpreted. Those translations and paraphrases were initially oral, but ultimately were written in two Targums.

- **The Onkelos Targum** was translated by Aquila, and dates back to 60 B.C. The oldest existing copy is from around 500 AD.
- **The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel** is a paraphrase of the Prophets, from about 30 BC. It contains the historical Books of the Old Testament and the Prophets. The oldest existing copies seem to be from about 500 AD. were written in Aramaic.

## The Greek Versions

1. The **Septuagint** is the oldest. It is usually quoted as the LXX or 70. It derives its name from the popular notion that seventy translators were employed and accomplished their work in seventy-two days.
2. **Aquila**, called Aquila of Pontus (flourished about 130), translated the Old Testament into Greek.
3. The **New Testament manuscripts** fall into two divisions.
  - **Uncials**, were an ancient form of writing in large capital letters that dates from the third century. It is estimated that there are 300 of these texts in existence today that contain parts of the New Testament.
  - **Cursives**, in small Greek letters, were a "running hand" script similar to our longhand. This script was continuous without breaks for words or lines or verses. There are about 4,200 cursives in existence.

The change between the two kinds of Greek writing took place about the tenth (10th) century AD.

Only five Greek manuscripts or codex of the New Testament are nearly complete and are more ancient than this date.

- The **Alexandrian** written in Alexandria around the fifth century A.D. contains almost the entire Bible.
- The **Vatican** is the oldest existent vellum (parchment) manuscript and was written in the fourth century.
- The **Ephraem** was written on parchment over the writings of Ephraem, a Syrian theological author. It was written in the fifth century, and contains most of the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament.
- The **Manuscript of Beza** belonged to the reformer Beza, who found a monastery in Lyons in 1562 A.D. It is imperfect, and is dated in the sixth century. It contains the Gospels and Acts in both Greek and Latin.
- The **Aleph, Codex Sinaiticus** is one of the most valuable of ancient manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. It was written in the fourth century. This oldest manuscript of the New Testament was probably written in Egypt.

### The Syriac or Aramaic Versions

- *Old Syriac Version* contains the Four Gospels, copied about the fourth century. Two copies exist today.
- *Syriac Peshitta* was the standard Syrian Version, created about 150-250 AD. More than 350 copies of it exist today. It was made directly from the original and not from the LXX (Septuagint) Version. It does not contain 2 or 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. These were added in a later version.
- *Palestinian Syriac* was written about 400-450 AD.
- *Philoxenian* about 508 AD and translated by Polycarp.
- *Harkleian Syriac* 616 AD, by Thomas of Harkel.

### The Latin Versions

- A Latin version of the Scriptures called the "*Old Latin*," originated in North Africa and was in common use in the time of Tertullian (A.D. 150). About 50 copies exist today.
- A Latin version made in Italy and called the *Itala*, was the most accurate Old Testament translation and appears to have been made from the LXX. *This version became greatly corrupted by repeated transcription.*
- *Jerome* (A.D. 329-420) was requested by Damasus, the bishop of Rome. By 384 AD, Jerome completed the task. It was originally opposed, but was recognized in the seventh century, as the "**Vulgate**" version. The word Vulgate means common or popular. More than 10,000 manuscript copies of the Vulgate exist today.
- The *Vulgate* Bible was the first book printed from a printing press in about A.D. 1455. The Council of Trent (1546) declared it "authentic." It is regarded as the sacred original in the Roman Catholic Church.

*All modern European versions have been influenced by the Vulgate.*

### Other Latin Versions

- *African Old Latin* or *Codex Babbiansis* 400 AD.
- *Codex Corbiensis* 400-500 AD. — contains the Four Gospels.
- *Codex Vercellensis* 360 AD.
- *Codex Palatinus* Fifth century AD.

### Other Versions

There are numerous other ancient versions of some importance.

- *Ethiopic* - Fourth century, from the Greek LXX; More than 2,000 manuscript copies of it exist today. Some scholars say sixth century.
- *Memphitic* - Circulated in Lower Egypt about the fourth century from the Greek.
- *Thebaic* - Designed for Upper Egypt, about the fourth century from the Greek.
- *Sahidic* - Early in the third century in Egypt
- *Bohairic* - Fourth century. About 100 manuscript copies now exist.
- *Middle Egyptian* - Fourth or fifth century.

- *Gothic*, written in the German language, but with the Greek alphabet, by Ulphilas (died A.D. 388), of which only fragments of the Old Testament remain; About 6 partial texts exist today.
- *Armenian* - about A.D. 400; About 2,600 manuscript copies exist today. Translated from a Greek Bible.
- *Slavonic* - in the ninth century, for ancient Moravia. Over 4,000 manuscript copies exist today.
- *Arabic* - About 75 manuscript copies exist today.
- *Persian* - Only 2 manuscript copies exist today.
- *Anglo-Saxon*. Seven manuscript copies exist today.
- *Georgian* - Fifth century.
- *Nubian* - Sixth century.

### The English Versions

The history of the English versions began with *John Wycliffe* (around AD 1384). Wycliffe was the first to translate the whole Bible into English (AD 1384).

Portions of the Scriptures were translated into **Saxon** by **Bede, AD 735**, and also into **English** by **Orme** at the close of the seventh century before Wycliffe. This version was made from the Vulgate. It was very forced and mechanical in style. Only a few hundred copies were made because the printing press had not yet been invented. Each copy was laboriously and meticulously copied by hand. There are 170 copies in existence.

*In 1454, Johann Gutenberg developed the movable type printing press.* This allowed the following Bible versions to be printed in larger quantity. The Protestant Revolution led by Martin Luther began soon after (1517), since a much larger number of scholars now had easy access to Biblical texts.

*Tyndale's translation* (1525-1531) was based on the original Greek of the New Testament, and was translated in a free idiomatic English. When the King James Authorized Version was produced almost a century later (1611), one-third of it retained Tyndale's wording and the rest retained his literary structure.

*Idioms* usually do not carry the same meaning when put in another language. "Three days' journey" may mean a journey of several days. Ezekiel 8:17 "Look at them putting the branch to their nose," is an obscure Hebrew idiom that was an insult. The NLT says: "*thumbing their noses at me and provoking my anger.*"

*Miles Coverdale's* (1535-1553) was not based on the original languages. His translation was a revision of Tyndale's Version and German versions. He introduced chapter summaries, and separated the Apocrypha from the other Old Testament books.

*Thomas Matthew's* (1537), was really the work of John Rogers, the first martyr under the reign of Queen Mary. This was the first Authorized Version. Henry VIII ordered a copy of it to be provided for every church a year after Tyndale was martyred for the crime of translating the Scriptures. In 1539, **Richard Taverner** published a revised edition of Matthew's Bible.

The *Great Bible*, so called from its great size, also called the **Cranmer's Bible**, was published in 1539 and 1568. In the strict sense, the "Great Bible" is "the only authorized version.

The *Geneva version* (1557-1560) was the **first version to recognize the division of the text into verses.**

The *Bishops' Bible* (1568) was a revision of the Great Bible. Although it was not a work of high merit, it was the basis for the King James Authorized Version.

The *Rheims and Douai versions*, under Roman Catholic guidance (1582, 1609) are the standard Roman Catholic Bible.

#### *The King James Authorized Version*

January 1604, King James I called the Hampton Court Conference in response to the Millenary Petition. The Millenary Petition addressed grievances of the Puritan party in the Church of England. John Reynolds, the president of the Corpus Christi College, Oxford, recommended having an English Bible that would be acceptable to all parties in the church. King James I supported the idea, which provided him the occasion to replace the two most popular versions of the English Bible: *the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible.*

Six companies and fifty-four men were assigned the work of revision. The books of the Bible and the Apocrypha were divided among the groups. *The Bishops' Bible* was used as a basis for the revision. Other English translations were used when agreed to better than *the Bishops' Bible.*

Those translations included: *Tyndale's* (1525-1531), *Thomas Matthew's* (1537), *Miles Coverdale's* (1535-1553), and the *Geneva* (1560). One-third of the translation retained Tyndale's wording and the remainder retained his literary structure. *The Rheims New Testament* influenced the translation. The committees retained many old ecclesiastical words and were influenced by the Latin. They frequently departed from Tyndale's version.

Although it is called the Authorized Version, the *King James Version* was never authorized. It replaced the *Bishops' Bible* in public use. Henry VIII, ordered a copy of it to be prepared for every church. The publishers added to the success of the *KJV* by stopping the publication of the *Bishop's Bible.*

Three editions of the King James appeared during its first year of publication. During the first years of publication, several errors occurred due to misspellings and omissions of words. The KJV faced revisions in 1613, 1629, 1638, 1653, 1701, 1762, and 1769. The last two revisions corrected spelling and removal of antique words. The 1769 revision differs in at least 75,000 details. All of the revisions to the King James Version were made without church or royal authority.

The *Revised Version* of the New Testament was published in 1880 and the Revised Old Testament in 1884. The two were combined and called the English Revised Version (1885).

There are currently 3,030 versions of the Bible in 2,011 languages.

### Newer Popular English Versions

- *The American Standard Version* (1901, 1946, 1957)
- *The Holy Bible; Revised Standard Version* (1946 [NT], 1952 [OT], 1971)
- *English Standard Version* (2001 Crossway)
- *The Living Bible* (1971)
- *The New International Version (NIV)* (1973, 1978, 1984)
- *The NET* (1996-2005)
- *The Simple English Version* (1978, 1980)
- *The New King James Version* (1982)
- *The Micro Bible* (1988)
- *Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* (Young, 1887, reprinted 1953)
- *The Twentieth Century New Testament* (1901)
- *Moffatt's Historical New Testament* (Moffatt, 1901)
- *Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech* (Weymouth, 1903)
- *The Holy Bible - An Improved Edition* (Amer. Baptist Publication Society, 1913);
- *Moffatt's The Bible - A New Translation* (Moffatt, 1922)
- *Goodspeed, The New Testament, an American Translation* (Goodspeed, 1923)
- *The Bible, an American Translation* (Goodspeed, 1931)
- *Williams New Testament* (Williams, 1937)
- *Phillips Letters to Young Churches* (Phillips, 1948) (paraphrase of NT Epistles)
- *The Gospels* (Phillips, 1953) (paraphrase for young people)
- *The Berkeley Version of the Bible* (Verkuyl, 1959)
- *Geneva Bible* (1560)
- *Amplified* (1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987)
- *New American Standard Bible* (1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995)
- *Contemporary English Version CEV*
- *New Century Version*
- *The Good News*
- *The Bible in Basic English*
- *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2003)