

The BibleKEY Correspondence Course

LESSON 3 - THE BIBLE: HOW IT CAME TO US - PART 2

Lesson 2 ended with the discussion of the latest known manuscripts of the New Testament - the Egyptian Versions. Lesson 3 will continue to trace the progression of the transmission of the Bible manuscripts and versions down to our times, with reference to the chart on page 2.

MANUSCRIPTS CONTAINING BOTH TESTAMENTS

The SYRIAC VERSION was a translation for those early Christians in the mountain districts of Syria. This was one of the earliest New Testament versions, translated about 150 A.D., almost contemporary with the writings of the apostles. It contained both the Old and New Testament, being translated from the Greek Septuagint. Copies of the Syriac version are in existence today, preserved at Leningrad in Russia, and at a monastery in Sinai. This version, like the Septuagint itself, is of inestimable worth to translators of the Bible, not to mention students of the Bible.

The LATIN VERSIONS were necessary for the regions of North Africa, particularly around the area of Carthage where Latin was the predominant language. This manuscript was called the *African Latin*, written about 300 A.D. About this time many other Latin versions were coming into existence as Latin gradually superseded Greek. These versions included both the Old and New Testaments, translated from the Greek. But there was a problem; with all the versions appearing, there were so many deviations and variations and outright mistakes occurring in these copies that a complete revision became necessary. The work of this revision fell upon the shoulders of a very capable and learned scholar of the third century A.D. called *Jerome*.

The sources he used for the translation of the Old Testament were the Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint, and the Syriac Old Testament manuscripts. The New Testament was mainly a revision of earlier Latin manuscripts, with the help of the Greek and Syriac manuscript. His work was completed in 386 A.D., and is termed the LATIN VULGATE. Some 30,000 copies of it were made and circulated. For hundreds of years it was regarded (and still is by the Roman Church) as the only correct text, and has had tremendous influence upon our modern versions as we shall presently observe.

The SINAITIC MANUSCRIPT - so called because of its recent discovery at the monastery at Sinai. It was written about 300 A.D., and contained both the Old and New Testaments in Greek. It was lost to the world at a very early date, and was discovered at Sinai in 1853. It was first removed to Leningrad, but was purchased by the British museum in 1933.

BibleKEY summary:

The SYRIAC VERSION was one of the earliest New Testament versions, translated about 150 A.D., for the early Christians in the mountain districts of Syria...

The LATIN VERSIONS were written about 300 A.D. for the regions of North Africa...

The LATIN VULGATE was a complete revision by Jerome in A.D. 386 because so many deviations and variations and outright mistakes had occurred in previous versions...it was promoted by the Roman Church as being the only true version of the Bible...

SINAITIC MANUSCRIPT - so called because of its recent discovery at Sinai. It was written about 300 A.D....

BibleKEY definition:

"revision" - the reproduction of a version using the earliest manuscripts available to update the translation of the text in accordance with an established revision guideline

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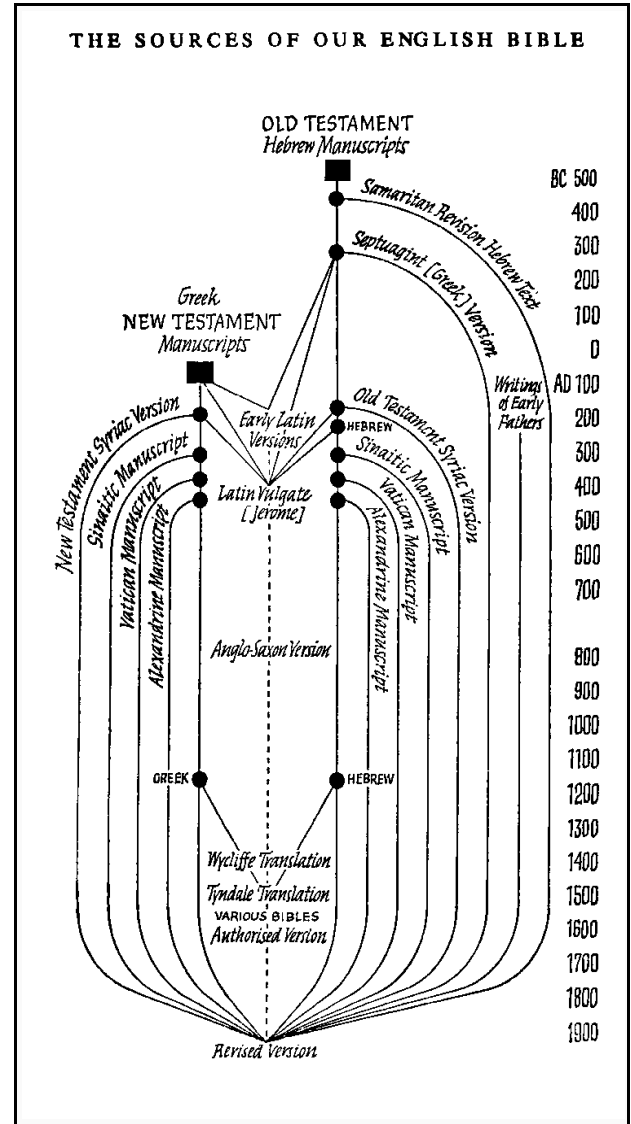
The VATICAN MANUSCRIPT - Originally copied from the Septuagint Version and New Testament Greek manuscripts about 370 A.D., and contained the entire Greek Bible, though parts of it are now missing due to age. This manuscript is now in the Vatican Library, although when or how it came to the Vatican is not known. It was not made available to translators until 1867.

The ALEXANDRIAN MANUSCRIPT - A Greek manuscript of the whole Bible written about 400 A.D., now lacking in certain parts. It was handed over to Britain in 1624 and is now located in the British Museum. It is an important witness to the manuscripts both of the Septuagint and the New Testament Greek.

All during the time that these copies were being written, great and sweeping changes were taking place in the literary and religious world. Latin was becoming the predominant language. As time went on, Greek and Hebrew were all but forgotten even by scholars of the day. This is the reason that important manuscripts such as we have just looked at were consigned to obscurity almost as soon as they were written. The LATIN VULGATE was promoted by the Roman Church as being the only true version of the Bible. They forgot that it was simply a translation of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Of the Vulgate they said, "It is the version of the Church, in her own language (Latin); why should it yield to Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, which have been for all these hundreds of years in the hands of Jewish unbelievers and Greek schismatics?"

This attitude set the stage for a display of violent resistance and persecution in aftertimes against anyone who should undertake the work of translating scripture into the common language of the people. They came to consider themselves custodians of the Bible and made every effort to keep it out of the hands of the public. They were successful in locking up the Vulgate manuscripts; however, due to a large initial circulation (30,000) the Vulgate continued to be a widely read Bible, but decreasingly so as once more the passing of centuries witnessed a gradual shift in the predominance of the language. By natural means the "church" was getting its way, for as less and less people in the passing of generations understood Latin, the Bible became less and less available to the public.

ANGLO-SAXON VERSIONS - a few of these appeared on the scene about the ninth century A.D. They did not flourish because



BibleKEY summary:

The VATICAN MANUSCRIPT
- Originally copied from the Septuagint Version and New Testament Greek manuscripts about 370 A.D.... now in the Vatican Library....

ALEXANDRIAN MANUSCRIPT
- A Greek manuscript of the whole Bible written about 400 A.D....an important witness to the Septuagint and the New Testament Greek.

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only a few copies were made, and the Anglo-Saxon language was very unstable at that time, being in a stage of rapid change.

These versions were direct translations from the Latin Vulgate into the Anglo-Saxon tongue. Succeeding copies endeavored to keep pace with the changing of the language, hence there were scores of revisions and alterations produced during this period of history.

THE WYCLIFFE BIBLE - About 1350 A.D. an Englishman named John Wycliffe translated the Latin Vulgate into the English language. For the first time the British people now had a Bible that they could read and understand in their own language.

However, this accomplishment aroused the fury and wrath of the Roman Church, whose attitude towards Wycliffe was expressed by a bishop as "That pestilent wretch, the son of the old serpent, the forerunner of anti-christ, who had completed his iniquity by inventing a new translation of the Scriptures." Before they were able to pour out their vicious vengeance upon him, however, he died a quiet and peaceful natural death.

But the fires of the wrath of the frustrated priesthood had been fanned, and many of Wycliffe's followers suffered death by persecution. Readers of the Bible were burned alive with copies of the Bible tied around their necks. Parents were executed for teaching their children the Lord's prayer and the Ten Commandments in English; husbands and wives were made to witness against each other; children were forced to light the fires that would burn their parents to death while they looked on. Possessors of the Wycliffe Bible were hunted down as if they were wild beasts.

At the same time as all this was going on, however, several things were developing which was destined to turn the tide and render the Church's warfare a losing one. First, Wycliffe's Bible was the last to be handwritten, for soon afterwards came the invention of the *printing press*. Secondly, there was renewed interest in Greek and Hebrew languages which resulted in their revival insofar as Bible translation was concerned. New copies from old manuscripts of Hebrew and Greek had been made in the 12th century. When these literary advances were coupled with the desire for church reformation, it resulted in the period which brought forth men like *Erasmus* and *William Tyndale*.

BIBLES PRINTED BY PRINTING PRESS

ERASMUS was a scholar of the Greek language, and his work focused mainly upon the New Testament. His was the first New Testament to be printed on a printing press. It was printed in Greek, copied from the 10th and 12th century Greek manuscripts.

BibleKEY summary:

ANGLO-SAXON VERSIONS

- appeared on the scene about 900 A.D. ...direct translations from the Vulgate into the Anglo-Saxon tongue...only a few copies were made...

The WYCLIFFE BIBLE .

- a translation of the Latin Vulgate into the English language about 1350 A.D.... for the first time the British people now had a Bible that they could read and understand in their own language....the last to be handwritten...

BibleKEY fact:

“ Readers of the Wycliffe Bible were burned alive with copies of the Bible tied around their necks... possessors of the Wycliffe Bible were hunted down as if they were wild beasts... ”

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Another scholar, XIMENES, also had a Greek New Testament about to be printed. Erasmus apparently came under some pressure from his publisher to have his work printed first. This pressure did not bode well for accuracy. Erasmus succeeded in having his text printed first, but later he admitted that it was at the expense of accuracy in certain instances. Fortunately, however, these inaccuracies are quite obvious and easily identified by the serious Bible student.

One obvious example is the passage in I John 5:6,7 (King James Version). It was translated from the Vulgate and forged into one of Erasmus' Greek manuscripts. He discerned the forgery, but in the haste and pressure for printing he decided to overlook it. The passage is not contained in any other manuscript, and the Revised Version correctly leaves it out.

WILLIAM TYNDALE was contemporary with Erasmus. Both lived in the time period around 1500 A.D. Tyndale was a very determined man with a remarkable knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. His version of the Bible was a translation direct from the most original Hebrew and Greek sources available to him, with some influence from the Latin Vulgate and the work of Erasmus. Thousands of copies of the complete Bible in the English language rolled off the press to be distributed to the eager and waiting hands of his fellowman. His life soon came to be in peril in England and he fled to Germany where the printing continued and Bibles were smuggled into England in bales of cloth and sacks of flour. The success was overwhelming, for there were far too many Bibles coming in to be destroyed by burning. But even in Germany, Tyndale was at last betrayed. He was taken to a miserable dungeon near Brussels, where he barely existed for some time at the hands of men devoid of mercy and compassion. Afterwards he was taken to the stake where he was strangled and burnt. His work, however, lived on.

THE KING JAMES VERSION: About the time of Tyndale's death, Henry VIII had a quarrel with the pope, the result of which was the establishment of the Church of England. Henry, and the Church of England, were favorable to the idea of a Bible for the people. The bishops of the English church were still offended by the stigma of Tyndale's name, and therefore his work was not sanctioned by them. The other Bibles which followed, however, were little more than editions of Tyndale's Bible. Then, in 1611, King James I issued the command which resulted in the translation and publishing of *The King James Version*. It differs little from the Bible of Tyndale, having as its base much the same sources -- the Hebrew & Greek manuscripts of the 12th century A.D., and, to a lesser degree, the Latin Vulgate. Approximately 80% of the Old Testament and 90% of the New Testament appear to be directly transferred from Tyndale's Bible.

It has had a profound effect upon the life and literature particularly of Western civilization. It is now more than 380 years since the it was first printed. It is still the most commonly accepted; however, due to

BibleKEY summary:

ERASMUS (1500 A.D.) was a Greek scholar - his was the first New Testament to be printed on a printing press in Greek... his text printed before XIMENES, but at the expense of some accuracy - i.e. 1 John 5:7

The TYNDALE version of the Bible (1500 A.D.) was an English translation direct from the most original Hebrew and Greek sources available to him, with some influence from the Latin Vulgate and the work of Erasmus....

KING JAMES VERSION - published in 1611, at the command of King James I, having as its sources the 12th century A.D. Hebrew & Greek manuscripts, the Tyndale Version, and, to a lesser degree, the Latin Vulgate...

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the changing English language, many words used therein are changed in meaning or have become obsolete entirely.

The REVISED VERSION: New discoveries of many old manuscripts since the publishing of the King James Version - such as the *Samaritan revision manuscript*., the *Greek Septuagint*, the *Syriac version*, the *Sinaitic manuscript*, the *Vatican manuscript*, the *Alexandrian manuscripts*, and others - prompted the writing of the *Revised Version* which was undertaken in 1870 and completed in 1885. A further revision some years later produced the REVISED STANDARD VERSION. We can rest assured that with the combination of the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version we have the original word of God as much as one language can express another. The reasons for the value of the combination of the two versions we will explain later.

RECENT DISCOVERIES

In the 1940s two remarkable discoveries occurred. The Egyptian Manuscripts commented upon in Lesson 2 were unearthed in 1941, and have provided an excellent source for checking New Testament accuracy of modern versions. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 are equally valuable for the Old Testament. They are in Hebrew and date back in time about 2000 years - to about the time of Christ or just before. They are almost contemporary with the completion of the Greek Septuagint. They were copied by members of the Qumran community, a religious order of that time. Again, like the Egyptian MSS they provide an excellent means of cross-checking for accuracy of text. Much work is still going on concerning these finds and as time progresses we may have a full translation of them in English.

One thing is to be noted - **the Egyptian Manuscripts and the Dead Sea Scrolls corroborate and support most of the translations currently in existence**, particularly the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version. Surely this is a tribute to the hundreds of translators and copiers through the centuries of time; for in the Dead Sea Scrolls we have a treasure of manuscripts at least 1000 years older than any formerly in existence, and yet the variation is negligible. **Even more so, however, does this indicate to us a guiding power throughout the translation and copying of scripture that is stronger and more consistent and accurate than merely the hand or will of man. It speaks to us of a power that works by natural means and in natural ways, but ultimately accomplishes that which is exactly as it was designed to be from the beginning.**

NEXT LESSON: "THE BIBLE: CHOOSING A VERSION"

BibleKEY summary:

*The REVISED VERSION
- prompted by recent
discoveries of many old
manuscripts since the
publishing of the King
James Version...*

*The Egyptian Manuscripts
provide an excellent source
for checking New Testament
accuracy of modern
versions...*

*The DEAD SEA SCROLLS
- discovered in 1947; date
back 2000 years; provide an
excellent source for
checking Old Testament
accuracy of modern
versions...*

BibleKEY fact:

“ *the Egyptian Manuscripts
and the Dead Sea Scrolls
corroborate and support
particularly the King James
Version and the Revised
Standard Version....*

*We can rest assured that
with the combination of the
King James Version and the
Revised Standard Version
we have the original word
of God as much as one
language can express
another ”*

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Name Mr/Mrs/Miss

Address Postal Code

* You may need an additional sheet for your answers if there is not enough space below. Your answers to the following questions will help you - and us - to determine how much you have discovered about your Bible. Please return this form in the envelope provided even if you are unable to answer all the questions. On receipt of it we will forward a further study, as well as some comments on your answers.

1. What is the primary importance of the Syriac Version?
2. a) What prompted the writing of the Latin Vulgate?

b) Is the policy of the Roman Church concerning the Latin Vulgate consistent with historical facts?
3. Was the Latin Vulgate readily available to the general public?
4. What made the Wycliffe Bible different from all others before it?
5. What happened to those who possessed the Wycliffe Bible?
6. a) What was the first Bible to be printed on the printing press?

b) What was the problem with this Bible?
7. What were the sources of the Tyndale Bible?
8. a) What was the reaction of the *authorities* to the publication of the Tyndale Bible?

b) What was the reaction of the *people* to the publication of the Tyndale Bible?
9. a) What circumstances prompted King James I to issue a command to translate and publish the King James Version?

b) Which were the sources used for the publishing of the King James Version?
10. a) Was the majority of the King James version translated or transferred?

b) Why might this distinction be important for us to understand?
11. What prompted the writing of the Revised Version?
12. Are the King James Version and the Revised Version considered to be reliable transmissions of the original word of God?
13. Why are the Egyptian manuscripts and the Dead Sea Scrolls important?