

The Origin of the



English Bible

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ENGLISH BIBLE HISTORY TIMELINE OF HOW WE GOT THE ENGLISH BIBLE

The story of how we got the English language Bible is, for the most part, the story of the Protestant Reformation which began in the late 14th Century AD with John Wycliffe. Indeed, if we go back more than just one thousand years, there is no language recognizable as “English” that even existed anywhere. The story of the Bible is much older than that, however.

The **first stories of the Bible go back to pre-history**, long before writing was invented. They were passed on in the same way as children’s playground songs are passed on today—by being consistently repeated. Passing stories on in this way is often called oral (or spoken) tradition. Round the campfires in the evenings, as worship, at work, or at war, people sang the songs and told the stories that they had learned as children. Because these stories were about God, they were treated with great respect. Every word was important and had to be repeated correctly.

The **first writing consisted of simple pictures** with one picture for each word. Writing like this, with over 800 pictures has been found in Babylonia (modern Iraq) and is **over 5,000 years old**.



The **first recorded instance of God’s Word being written down, was when the Lord Himself wrote it down in the form of Ten Commandments** on the stone tablets delivered to Moses at the top of Mount Sinai. Biblical scholars believe this occurred **between 1,400 BC and 1,500 BC**... almost 3,500 years ago. The language used was almost certainly an ancient form of Hebrew, the language of Old Covenant believers.

The earliest scripture is generally considered to be the “**Pentateuch**”, the first five books of Moses: **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy**... though there is some scholarly evidence to indicate that the Old Testament Book of Job may actually be the oldest book in the Bible. The Old Testament scriptures were written in ancient Hebrew, a language substantially different than the Hebrew of today. These writings were passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years on scrolls made of animal skin, usually sheep, but sometimes deer or cow. Animals considered “unclean” by the Jews, such as pigs, were of course, never used to make scrolls.

When the entire Pentateuch is present on a scroll, it is called a “**Torah**”. An entire Torah Scroll, if completely unraveled, is over 150 feet long! As most sheep are only about two to three feet long, it took an entire flock of sheep to make just one Torah scroll.

The **Jewish scribes who painstakingly produced each scroll were perfectionists**. If they made even the slightest mistake in copying, such as allowing two letters of a word to touch, they destroyed that entire panel (the last three or four columns of text), and the panel before it, because it had touched the panel with a mistake! To make sure that each scribe understood the importance of his work, and to stop him making mistakes, careful rules were followed. For example:

- Each day he had to start his work with prayer.
- The name of God had to be left blank, to be filled in later by a different scribe using a “purer” ink.
- At the end of a section of a book, the scribe counted the lines, the words and the letters in the original and checked them with his copy. He also found and checked the middle word of each section.

While most Christians today would consider this behavior fanatical and even idolatrous (worshipping the scripture, rather than the One who gave it to us), it nevertheless demonstrates

the level of faithfulness to accuracy applied to the preservation of God's Word throughout the first couple of thousand years of Biblical transmission.

Hebrew has one thing in common with English: they are both "picture languages". Their words form a clear picture in your mind. As evidence of this; the first man to ever print the scriptures in English, William Tyndale, once commented that Hebrew was ten times easier to translate into English than any other language. Tyndale would certainly be qualified to make such a statement, as he was so fluent in eight languages, that it was said you would have thought any one of them to be his native tongue.

By approximately **500 BC**, the **39 Books that make up the Old Testament** were completed, and continued to be preserved in Hebrew on scrolls. As we approach the last few centuries before Christ, the Jewish historical books known as the "**Apocrypha**" were completed, yet they were recorded in Greek rather than Hebrew. By the **end of the First Century AD**, the **New Testament** had been completed. It was preserved in Greek on Papyrus, a thin paper-like material made from crushed and flattened stalks of a reed-like plant. **The word "Bible" comes from the same Greek root word as "papyrus"**. The papyrus sheets were bound, or tied together in a configuration much more similar to modern books than to an elongated scroll.

These groupings of papyrus were called a "codex" (plural: "codices"). **The oldest copies of the New Testament known to exist today are:** The Codex Alexandrius and the Codex Sinaiticus in the British Museum Library in London, and the Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican. They date back to **approximately the 300's AD**. In **315 AD**, **Athenasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, identified the 27 Books** which we recognize today as the canon of New Testament scripture.

Aramaic was spoken by the Persians, who were the major power in the Middle East for two hundred years from about 550 B.C. Aramaic became the language used by traders in that region. Parts of the Old Testament books of Daniel, Ezra, and Jeremiah were written in Aramaic. **Some manuscripts of parts of the Old Testament in Aramaic**, called "Targums" have survived and the help us discover the words of the original Hebrew.

By **New Testament times**, **Aramaic was the everyday language** of the Jews, and Jesus would have spoken it. However, **Hebrew remained the language for prayer and worship**. Educated people still understood Hebrew, but when the Hebrew Bibles was read aloud in synagogue services, a translator often gave the meaning in Aramaic.

In 331 B.C the Greek general Alexander the Great conquered Persia, He now ruled the known ancient world, and "common" **Greek became the language that most people understood**.

When the followers of Jesus **wrote the New Testament**, they wanted the whole known world the hear the Good News, so **they wrote in Greek**, translating the Aramaic spoken by Jesus into the Greek language.

In **382 AD**, the early church father Jerome **translated the New Testament from its original Greek into Latin**. This translation became known as the "Latin Vulgate", ("Vulgate" meaning "vulgar" or "common"). He put a note next to the Apocrypha Books, stating that he did not know whether or not they were inspired scripture or just Jewish historical writings which accompanied the Old Testament.

The Apocrypha was kept as part of virtually every Bible scribed or printed from these early days until just 120 years ago, in the mid-1880's, when it was removed from Protestant Bibles. Up until the 1880's, however, every Christian... Protestant or otherwise... embraced the Apocrypha as part of the Bible, though debate continued as to whether or not the Apocrypha was inspired. There is no truth to the popular myth that there is something "Roman Catholic" about the Apocrypha, which stemmed from the fact that the Roman Catholics kept 12 of the 14 Apocrypha

Books in their Bible, as the Protestants removed all of them. No real justification was ever given for the removal of these ancient Jewish writings from before the time of Christ, which had remained untouched and part of every Bible for nearly two thousand years.

By **500 AD** the Bible had been translated into over 500 languages. Just one century later, by **600 AD**, it has been restricted to only one language: the **Latin Vulgate!** The only organized and recognized church at that time in history was the Catholic Church of Rome, and they refused to allow the scripture to be available in any language other than Latin. Those in possession of non-Latin scriptures would be executed! This was because only the priests were educated to understand Latin, and this gave the church ultimate power... a power to rule without question... a power to deceive... a power to extort money from the masses. Nobody could question their "Biblical" teachings, because few people other than priests could read Latin. The church capitalized on this forced-ignorance through the **1,000 year period from 400 AD to 1,400 AD** known as the "**Dark and Middle Ages**".

Pope Leo the Tenth established a practice called the "**selling of indulgences**" as a way to extort money from the people. He offered forgiveness of sins for a fairly small amount of money. For a little bit more money, you would be allowed to indulge in a continuous lifestyle of sin, such as keeping a mistress. Also, through the invention of "Purgatory", you could purchase the salvation of your loved-one's souls. The church taught the ignorant masses, "*As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the troubled soul from Purgatory springs!*" Pope Leo the Tenth showed his true feelings when he said, "*The fable of Christ has been quite profitable to us!*"

Editorial Note (from *www.Greatsite.com*; Author and Editor, John L. Jeffcoat III): Let us state at this point, that it is not our intent to offend or "bash" Roman Catholics. It is unavoidable that every historical account has its "good guys" and its "bad guys". Just as it is impossible to accurately tell the story of World War Two without offending the Germans and the Italians who were undeniably the enemies of world peace at that time... it is equally impossible to accurately tell the story of the English Bible without unintentionally offending those who continue to revere the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches.

Where was the true church of God during these Dark Ages?

On the Scottish Island of Iona, in **563 AD**, a man named **Columbia** started a **Bible College**. For **the next 700 years**, this was the source of much of the non-Catholic, evangelical Bible teaching through those centuries of the Dark and Middle Ages. The students of this college were called "Culdees", which means "certain stranger". The Culdees were a secret society, and the remnant of the true Christian faith was kept alive by these men during the many centuries that led up to the Protestant Reformation.

In fact, the first man to be called a "Culdee" was Joseph of Aremethia. The Bible tells us that Joseph of Aremethia gave up his tomb for Jesus. Tradition tells us that he was actually the Uncle of the Virgin Mary, and therefore the Great-Uncle (or "half-Uncle" at least) of Jesus. It is also believed that Joseph of Aremethia traveled to the British Isles shortly after the resurrection of Christ, and built the first Christian Church above ground there. Tradition also tells us that Jesus may have spent much of his young adult life (between 13 and 30) traveling the world with his Great Uncle Joseph... though the Bible is silent on these years in the life of Jesus.

In the **late 1300's**, the **secret society of Culdees** chose **John Wycliffe** to lead the world out of the Dark Ages. Wycliffe has been called the "Morning Star of the Reformation". The Protestant Reformation was about one thing: getting the Word of God back into the hands of the masses in their own native language, so that the corrupt church would be exposed and the message of salvation in Christ alone, by scripture alone, through faith alone would be proclaimed again.



The first hand-written English language Bible manuscripts were produced in the 1380's AD by John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor, scholar, and theologian. Wycliffe, (also spelled "Wycliff" & "Wyclif"), was well-known throughout Europe for his opposition to the teaching of the organized Church, which he believed to be contrary to the Bible. With the help of his followers, called the Lollards, and his assistant Purvey, and many other faithful scribes, Wycliffe produced dozens of English language manuscript copies of the scriptures. They were translated out of the Latin Vulgate, which was the only source text available to Wycliffe. The Pope was so infuriated by his teachings and his translation of the Bible into English, that 44 years after Wycliffe had died, he ordered the bones to be dug-up, crushed, and scattered in the river!

One of Wycliffe's followers, **John Hus**, actively promoted Wycliffe's ideas: *that people should be permitted to read the Bible in their own language, and they should oppose the tyranny of the Roman church that threatened anyone possessing a non-Latin Bible with execution.* Hus was burned at the stake in 1415, with Wycliffe's manuscript Bibles used as kindling for the fire. The last words of John Hus were that, *"in 100 years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed."*



Almost exactly 100 years later, in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses of Contention (a list of 95 issues of heretical theology and crimes of the Roman Catholic Church) into the church door at Wittenberg. The prophecy of Hus had come true! Martin Luther went on to be the first man to print the Bible in the German language. Foxe's Book of Martyrs records that in that same year, 1517, seven people were burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church for the crime of teaching their children to say the Lord's Prayer in English rather than Latin.



Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1450's, and the first book to ever be printed was a Latin language Bible, printed in Mainz, Germany. Gutenberg's Bibles were surprisingly beautiful, as each leaf Gutenberg printed was later colorfully hand-illuminated. Born as "Johann Gensfleisch" (John Gooseflesh), he preferred to be known as "Johann Gutenberg" (John Beautiful Mountain). Ironically, though he had created what many believe to be the most important invention in history, Gutenberg was a victim of unscrupulous business associates who took control of his business and left him in poverty. Nevertheless, the invention of the movable-type printing press meant that Bibles and books could finally be effectively produced in large quantities in a short period of time. This was essential to the success of the Reformation.



In the 1490's another Oxford professor, and the personal physician to King Henry the 7th and 8th, **Thomas Linacre, decided to learn Greek.** After reading the Gospels in Greek, and comparing it to the Latin Vulgate, he wrote in his diary, *"Either this (the original Greek) is not the Gospel... or we are not Christians."* The Latin had become so corrupt that it no longer even preserved the message of the Gospel... yet the Church still threatened to kill anyone who read the scripture in any language other than Latin... though Latin was not an original language of the scriptures.

In 1496, John Colet, another Oxford professor and the son of the Mayor of London, **started reading the New Testament in Greek and translating it into English for his students at Oxford**, and later for the public at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. The people were so hungry to hear the Word of God in a language they could understand, that within six months there were 20,000 people packed in the church and at least that many outside trying to get in! Sadly, while the enormous and beautiful Saint Paul's Cathedral remains the main church in London today, as of 2003, typical Sunday morning worship attendance is only around 200 people, and most of them are tourist. Fortunately for Colet, he was a powerful man with friends in high places, so he amazingly managed to avoid execution.



In considering the experiences of Linacre and Colet, **the great scholar Erasmus was so moved to correct the corrupt Latin Vulgate, that in 1516**, with the help of printer John Froben, he **published a Greek-Latin Parallel New Testament**. The Latin part was not the corrupt Vulgate, but his own fresh rendering of the text from the more accurate and reliable Greek, which he had managed to collate from a half-dozen partial old Greek New Testament manuscripts he had acquired. This milestone was the first non-Latin Vulgate text of the scripture to be produced in a millennium... and the first ever to come off a printing press. The 1516 Greek-Latin New Testament of Erasmus further focused attention on just how corrupt and inaccurate the Latin Vulgate had become, and how important it was to go back and use the original Greek (New Testament) and original Hebrew (Old Testament) languages to maintain accuracy... and to translate them faithfully into the languages of the common people, whether that be English, German, or any other tongue. No sympathy for this "illegal activity" was to be found from Rome... even as the words of Pope Leo X's declaration that *"the fable of Christ was quite profitable to him"* continued through the years to infuriate the people of God.



William Tyndale was the Captain of the Army of Reformers, and was their spiritual leader. Tyndale holds the distinction of being **the first man to ever print the New Testament in the English language**. Tyndale was a true scholar and a genius, so fluent in eight languages that it was said one would think any one of them to be his native tongue. He is frequently referred to as the "Architect of the English Language", (even more so than William Shakespeare) as so many of the phrases Tyndale coined are still in our language today.

Martin Luther had a small head-start on Tyndale, **as Luther declared his intolerance for the Roman Church's corruption on Halloween in 1517**, by nailing his 95 Theses of Contention to the Wittenberg Church door. Luther, who would be exiled in the months following the Diet of Worms Council in 1521 that was designed to martyr him, would **translate the New Testament into German for the first time from the 1516 Greek-Latin New Testament of Erasmus, and publish it in September of 1522**. Luther also published a German Pentateuch in 1523, and another edition of the German New Testament in 1529. In the 1530's he would go on to publish the entire Bible in German.



William Tyndale wanted to use the same 1516 Erasmus text as a source to translate and print the New Testament in English for the first time in history. **Tyndale showed up on Luther's doorstep in Germany in 1525, and by year's end had translated the New Testament into English**. Tyndale had been forced to flee England, because of the wide-spread rumor that his English New Testament project was underway, causing inquisitors and bounty hunters to be constantly on Tyndale's trail to arrest him and prevent his project. God foiled their plans, and **in 1525-1526 the Tyndale New Testament became the first printed edition of the scripture in the English language**. Subsequent printings of the Tyndale New Testament in the 1530's were often elaborately illustrated.

They were burned as soon as the Bishop could confiscate them, but copies trickled through and actually ended up in the bedroom of King Henry VIII. The more the King and Bishop resisted its distribution, the more fascinated the public at large became. The church declared it contained thousands of errors as they torched hundreds of New Testaments confiscated by the clergy, while in fact, they burned them because they could find no errors at all. One risked death by burning if caught in mere possession of Tyndale's forbidden books.

Having God's Word available to the public in the language of the common man, English, would have meant disaster to the church. No longer would they control access to the scriptures. If people were able to read the Bible in their own tongue, the church's income and power would crumble. They could not possibly continue to get away with selling indulgences (the forgiveness of sins) or selling the release of loved ones from a church-manufactured "Purgatory". People

would begin to challenge the church's authority if the church were exposed as frauds and thieves. The contradictions between what God's Word said, and what the priests taught, would open the public's eyes and the truth would set them free from the grip of fear that the institutional church held. Salvation through faith, not works or donations, would be understood. The need for priests would vanish through the priesthood of all believers. The veneration of church-canonized Saints and Mary would be called into question. The availability of the scriptures in English was the biggest threat imaginable to the wicked church. Neither side would give up without a fight.

Today, there are only two known copies left of Tyndale's 1525-26 First Edition. Any copies printed prior to 1570 are extremely valuable. Tyndale's flight was an inspiration to freedom-loving Englishmen who drew courage from the 11 years that he was hunted. Books and Bibles flowed into England in bales of cotton and sacks of flour. Ironically, Tyndale's biggest customer was the King's men, who would buy up every copy available to burn them... and Tyndale used their money to print even more! In the end, Tyndale was caught: betrayed by an Englishman that he had befriended. Tyndale was incarcerated for 500 days before he was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. Tyndale's last words were, *"Oh Lord, open the King of England's eyes"*. This prayer would be answered just three years later in 1539, when King Henry VIII finally allowed, and even funded, the printing of an English Bible known as the "Great Bible". But before that could happen...



Myles Coverdale and John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers had remained loyal disciples the last six years of Tyndale's life, and they carried the English Bible project forward and even accelerated it. **Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament, and in 1535 he printed the first complete Bible in the English language**, making use of Luther's German text and the Latin as sources. Thus, the **first complete English Bible was printed on October 4, 1535**, and is known as the Coverdale Bible.

John Rogers went on to print **the second complete English Bible in 1537**. It was, however, **the first English Bible translated from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew & Greek**. He printed it under the pseudonym "Thomas Matthew", (an assumed name that had actually been used by Tyndale at one time) as a considerable part of this Bible was the translation of Tyndale, whose writings had been condemned by the English authorities. It is a composite made up of Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament (1534-1535 edition) and Coverdale's Bible and some of Roger's own translation of the text. It remains known most commonly as the Matthew-Tyndale Bible. It went through a nearly identical second-edition printing in 1549.



In 1539, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the bequest of King Henry VIII to publish the "Great Bible". It became **the first English Bible authorized for public use**, as it was distributed to every church, chained to the pulpit, and a reader was even provided so that the illiterate could hear the Word of God in plain English. It would seem that William Tyndale's last wish had been granted...just three years after his martyrdom. Cranmer's Bible, published by Coverdale, was known as the Great Bible due to its great size: a large pulpit folio measuring over 14 inches tall. Seven editions of this version were printed between April of 1539 and December of 1541.



It was not that **King Henry VIII** had a change of conscience regarding publishing the Bible in English. His motives were more sinister... but the Lord sometimes uses the evil intentions of men to bring about His glory. King Henry VIII had in fact, requested that the Pope permit him to divorce his wife and marry his mistress. The Pope refused. King Henry responded by marrying his mistress anyway, (later having two of his many wives executed), and thumbing his nose at the Pope by renouncing Roman Catholicism, taking England out from under Rome's religious control, and declaring himself as the reigning head of State to also be the new head of the Church. This new branch of the Christian Church, neither Roman Catholic nor truly Protestant, became known as the

Anglican Church or the Church of England. King Henry acted essentially as its "Pope". **His first act was to further defy the wishes of Rome by funding the printing of the scriptures in English... the first legal English Bible... just for spite.**



The ebb and flow of freedom continued through the 1540's...and into the 1550's. After King Henry VIII, King Edward VI took the throne, and after his death, the reign of **Queen "Bloody" Mary** was the next obstacle to the printing of the Bible in English. **She was possessed in her quest to return England to the Roman Church.** In 1555, John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers and Thomas Cranmer were both burned at the stake. Mary went on to burn reformers at the stake by the hundreds for the "crime" of being a Protestant. This era was known as the Marian Exile, and the refugees fled from England with little hope of ever seeing their home or friends again.



In the 1550's, the Church at Geneva, Switzerland, was very sympathetic to the reformer refugees and was one of only a few safe havens for a desperate people. Many of them met in Geneva, led by Myles Coverdale and **John Foxe (publisher of the famous Foxe's Book of Martyrs**, which is to this day the only exhaustive reference work on the persecution and martyrdom of Early Christians and Protestants from the first century up to the mid-16th century), as well as Thomas Sampson and William Whittingham.

There, with the protection of the great theologian **John Calvin** (author of the most famous theological book ever published, Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion) and John Knox, the great Reformer of the Scottish Church, the Church of Geneva determined to produce a Bible that would educate their families while they continued in exile.



The New Testament was completed in 1557, and the complete Bible was first published in 1560. It became known as the **Geneva Bible**. Due to a passage in Genesis describing the clothing that God fashioned for Adam and Eve upon expulsion from the Garden of Eden as "Breeches" (an antiquated form of "Britches"), some people referred to the Geneva Bible as the Breeches Bible.

The Geneva Bible was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters, so that referencing specific passages would be easier. Every chapter was also accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references so thorough and complete that the Geneva Bible is also considered the first English "Study Bible". William Shakespeare quotes hundreds of times in his plays from the Geneva translation of the Bible. The Geneva Bible became the Bible of choice for over 100 years of English speaking Christians. Between 1560 and 1644 at least 144 editions of this Bible were published. Examination of the 1611 King James Bible shows clearly that its translators were influenced much more by the Geneva Bible, than by any other source. The Geneva Bible itself retains over 90% of William Tyndale's original English translation. The Geneva in fact, remained more popular than the King James Version until decades after its original release in 1611! **The Geneva holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America**, and the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims. It is truly the **"Bible of the Protestant Reformation."** Strangely, the famous Geneva Bible has been out-of-print since 1644, so the only way to obtain one is to either purchase an original printing of the Geneva Bible, or a less costly facsimile reproduction of the original 1560 Geneva Bible.

With the end of Queen Mary's bloody reign, the reformers could safely return to England. The Anglican Church, now under Queen Elizabeth I, reluctantly tolerated the printing and distribution of Geneva version Bibles in England. The marginal notes, which were vehemently against the institutional Church of the day, did not rest well with the rulers of the day. Another version, one with a less inflammatory tone was desired, and the copies of the Great Bible were getting to be decades old. **In 1568, a revision of the Great Bible known as the Bishop's Bible** was introduced. Despite 19 editions being printed between 1568 and 1606, this Bible, referred to as

the “rough draft of the King James Version”, never gained much of a foothold of popularity among the people. The Geneva may have simply been too much to compete with.

By the **1580's**, the **Roman Catholic Church** saw that it had lost the battle to suppress the will of God: that His Holy Word be available in the English language. **In 1582, the Church of Rome surrendered their fight for "Latin only"** and decided that if the Bible was to be available in English, they would at least have an official Roman Catholic English translation. And so, using the corrupt and inaccurate Latin Vulgate as the only source text, they went on to publish an English Bible with all the distortions and corruptions that Erasmus had revealed and warned of 75 years earlier. Because it was translated at the Roman Catholic College in the city of Rheims, it was known as the Rheims New Testament (also spelled Rhemes). The **Douay Old Testament was translated by the Church of Rome in 1609** at the College in the city of Douay (also spelled Doway & Douai). The combined product is commonly referred to as the "Doway/Rheims" Version. **In 1589, Dr. William Fulke of Cambridge published the "Fulke's Refutation"**, in which he printed in parallel columns the Bishops Version along side the Rheims Version, attempting to show the error and distortion of the Roman Church's corrupt compromise of an English version of the Bible.



With the death of Queen Elizabeth I, Prince James VI of Scotland became **King James I of England**. The Protestant clergy approached the new King in 1604 and announced their desire for a new translation to replace the Bishop's Bible first printed in 1568. They knew that the Geneva Version had won the hearts of the people because of its excellent scholarship, accuracy, and exhaustive commentary. However, they did not want the controversial marginal notes (proclaiming the Pope an Anti-Christ, etc.) Essentially, the leaders of the church desired a Bible for the people, with scriptural references only for word clarification or cross-references.

This "translation to end all translations" (for a while at least) was the result of the combined effort of about fifty scholars. They took into consideration: The Tyndale New Testament, The Coverdale Bible, The Matthews Bible, The Great Bible, The Geneva Bible, and even the Rheims New Testament. The great revision of the Bishop's Bible had begun. From 1605 to 1606 the scholars engaged in private research. From 1607 to 1609 the work was assembled. **In 1610 the work went to press, and in 1611 the first of the huge (16 inch tall) pulpit folios known today as "The 1611 King James Bible" came off the printing press.** A typographical discrepancy in Ruth 3:15 rendered a pronoun "He" instead of "She" in that verse in some printings.

This caused some of the 1611 First Editions to be known by collectors as "He" Bibles, and others as "She" Bibles. Starting just one year after the huge 1611 pulpit-size King James Bibles were printed and chained to every church pulpit in England; printing then began on the earliest normal-size printings of the King James Bible. These were produced so individuals could have their own personal copy of the Bible.

The Anglican Church's King James Bible took decades to overcome the more popular Protestant Church's Geneva Bible. One of the greatest ironies of history, is that many **Protestant Christian churches today embrace the King James Bible exclusively as the "only" legitimate English language translation... yet it is not even a Protestant translation!** It was printed to compete with the Protestant Geneva Bible, by authorities who throughout most of history were hostile to Protestants... and killed them. While many Protestants are quick to assign the full blame of persecution to the Roman Catholic Church, it should be noted that even after England broke from Roman Catholicism in the 1500's, the Church of England (The Anglican Church) continued to persecute Protestants throughout the 1600's.

One famous example of this is **John Bunyan, who while in prison for the crime of preaching the Gospel, wrote one of Christian history's greatest books, Pilgrim's Progress.** Throughout the 1600's, as the Puritans and the Pilgrims fled the religious persecution of England to cross the Atlantic and start a new free nation



in America, they took with them their precious Geneva Bible, and rejected the King's Bible. America was founded upon the Geneva Bible, not the King James Bible.

Protestants today are largely unaware of their own history, and unaware of the Geneva Bible (which is textually 95% the same as the King James Version, but 50 years older than the King James Version, and not influenced by the Roman Catholic Rheims New Testament that the King James translators admittedly took into consideration).

Nevertheless, **the King James Bible turned out to be an excellent and accurate translation**, and it became the most printed book in the history of the world, and **the only book with one billion copies in print**. In fact, for over 250 years...until the appearance of the English Revised Version of 1881-1885...the King James Version reigned without much of a rival.

One little-known fact, is that for the past 200 years, **all King James Bibles published in America are actually the 1769 Baskerville spelling and wording revision of the 1611**. The original "1611" preface is deceptively included by the publishers, and no mention of the fact that it is really the 1769 version is to be found, because that might hurt sales. The only way to obtain a true, unaltered, 1611 version is to either purchase an original pre-1769 printing of the King James Bible, or a less costly facsimile reproduction of the original 1611 King James Bible.



Although **the first Bible printed in America was done in the native Algonquin Indian Language by John Eliot in 1663**; the **first English language Bible to be printed in America by Robert Aitken in 1782** was a King James Version. Robert Aitken's 1782 Bible was also the only Bible ever authorized by the United States Congress. He was commended by President George Washington for providing Americans with Bibles during the embargo of imported English goods due to the Revolutionary War. In 1808, Robert's daughter, Jane Aitken, would become the first woman to ever print a Bible... and to do so in America, of course. In 1791, Isaac Collins vastly improved upon the quality and size of the typesetting of American Bibles and produced the first "Family Bible" printed in America... also a King James Version. Also in 1791, Isaiah Thomas published the first Illustrated Bible printed in America...in the King James Version.



While **Noah Webster**, just a few years after producing his famous Dictionary of the English Language, would produce his own **modern translation of the English Bible in 1833**; the public remained too loyal to the King James Version for Webster's version to have much impact. It was not really until the 1880's that England's own planned replacement for their King James Bible, the English Revised Version (E.R.V.) would become the first English language Bible to gain popular acceptance as a post-King James Version modern-English Bible. The widespread popularity of this modern-English translation brought with it another curious characteristic: the absence of the 14 Apocryphal books.

Up until the 1880's every Protestant Bible (not just Catholic Bibles) had 80 books, not 66! The inter-testamental books written hundreds of years before Christ called "The Apocrypha" were part of virtually every printing of the Tyndale-Matthews Bible, the Great Bible, the Bishops Bible, the Protestant Geneva Bible, and the King James Bible until their removal in the 1880's! The original 1611 King James contained the Apocrypha, and King James threatened anyone who dared to print the Bible without the Apocrypha with heavy fines and a year in jail. Only for the last 120 years has the Protestant Church rejected these books, and removed them from their Bibles. This has left most modern-day Christians believing the popular myth that there is something "Roman Catholic" about the Apocrypha. There is, however, no truth in that myth, and no widely-accepted reason for the removal of the Apocrypha in the 1880's has ever been officially issued by a mainline Protestant denomination.

The Americans responded to England's E.R.V. Bible by publishing the nearly-identical **American Standard Version (A.S.V.) in 1901**. It was also widely-accepted and embraced by churches throughout America for many decades as the leading modern-English version of the Bible. In the

1971, it was again revised and called **New American Standard Version Bible** (often referred to as the N.A.S.V. or N.A.S.B. or N.A.S.). This New American Standard Bible is considered by nearly all evangelical Christian scholars and translators today, to be **the most accurate, word-for-word translation of the original Greek and Hebrew scriptures into the modern English language that has ever been produced**. It remains the most popular version among theologians, professors, scholars, and seminary students today. Some, however, have taken issue with it because it is so direct and literal a translation (focused on accuracy), that it does not flow as easily in conversational English.

For this reason, in **1973**, the **New International Version** (N.I.V.) was produced, which was offered as a “dynamic equivalent” translation into modern English. The N.I.V. was designed not for “word-for-word” accuracy, but rather, for **“phrase-for-phrase” accuracy**, and **ease of reading** even at a Junior High-School reading level. It was meant to appeal to a broader (and in some instances less-educated) cross-section of the general public. Critics of the N.I.V. often jokingly refer to it as the “Nearly Inspired Version”, but that has not stopped it from becoming the best-selling modern-English translation of the Bible ever published.

In **1982**, Thomas Nelson Publishers produced what they called the **“New King James Version”**. Their original intent was to keep the basic wording of the King James to appeal to King James Version loyalists, while only changing the most obscure words and the Elizabethan “thee, thy, thou” pronouns. This was an interesting marketing ploy, however, upon discovering that this was not enough of a change for them to be able to legally copyright the result, they had to make more significant revisions, which defeated their purpose in the first place. It was **never taken seriously by scholars, but it has enjoyed some degree of public acceptance**, simply because of its clever “New King James Version” marketing name.

In **2002**, a major attempt was made to bridge the gap between the simple readability of the N.I.V., and the extremely precise accuracy of the N.A.S.B. This translation is called the **English Standard Version** (E.S.V.) and is rapidly gaining popularity for its **readability and accuracy**. The 21st Century will certainly continue to bring new translations of God’s Word in the modern English language.

As Christians, we must be very careful to make intelligent and informed decisions about what translations of the Bible we choose to read. On the liberal extreme, we have people who would give us heretical new translations that attempt to change God’s Word to make it politically correct. One example of this, which has made headlines recently is the **Today’s New International Version** (T.N.I.V.) which seeks to **remove all gender-specific references** in the Bible whenever possible! Not all new translations are good... and some are very bad.

But equally dangerous, is the other extreme... of blindly rejecting ANY English translation that was produced in the four centuries that have come after the 1611 King James. We must remember that **the main purpose of the Protestant Reformation was to get the Bible out of the chains of being trapped in an ancient language that few could understand, and into the modern, spoken, conversational language of the present day**. William Tyndale fought and died for the right to print the Bible in the common, spoken, modern English tongue of his day... as he boldly told one official who criticized his efforts, *“If God spare my life, I will see to it that the boy who drives the plowshare knows more of the scripture than you, Sir!”*

Will we now go backwards, and seek to imprison God’s Word once again exclusively in ancient translations? Clearly it is not God’s will that we over-react to SOME of the bad modern translations, by rejecting ALL new translations and *“throwing the baby out with the bathwater”*. **The Word of God is unchanging from generation to generation, but language is a dynamic and ever-changing form of communication**. We therefore have a responsibility before God as Christians to make sure that each generation has a modern translation that they can easily understand, yet that does not sacrifice accuracy in any way. Let’s be ever mindful that we are not

called to worship the Bible. That is called idolatry. **We are called to worship the God who gave us the Bible**, and who preserved it through the centuries of people who sought to destroy it.

TIMELINE OF BIBLE TRANSLATION HISTORY

1400 BC: The first written Word of God: The Ten Commandments delivered to Moses.

500 BC: Completion of all original Hebrew manuscripts which make up the 39 Books of the Old Testament.

200 BC: Completion of the Septuagint Greek manuscripts which contain the 39 Old Testament Books and 14 Apocrypha books.

1st Century AD: Completion of all original Greek manuscripts which make up the 27 books of the New Testament.

315 AD: Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, identifies the 27 books of the New Testament which are today recognized as the canon of scripture.

382 AD: Jerome's Latin Vulgate manuscripts produced which contain all 80 Books (39 Old Test. + 14 Apocrypha + 27 New Test).

500 AD: Scriptures have been translated into over 500 Languages.

600 AD: LATIN was the only language allowed for Scripture.

995 AD: Anglo-Saxon (early roots of English language) translations of the New Testament produced.

1384 AD: Wycliffe is the first person to produce a hand-written, manuscript copy of the complete Bible; All 80 Books.

1455 AD: Gutenberg Invents the printing press; Books may now be mass-produced instead of individually hand-written. The first book ever printed is Gutenberg's Bible in Latin.

1516 AD: Erasmus produces a Greek/Latin Parallel New Testament.

1522 AD: Martin Luther's German New Testament.

1526 AD: William Tyndale's New Testament; The first New Testament printed in the English language.

1535 AD: Myles Coverdale's Bible; The first complete Bible printed in the English language (80 Books: O.T. & N.T. & Apocrypha).

1537 AD: Tyndale-Matthews Bible; The second complete Bible printed in English. Done by John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers (80 books).

1539 AD: The "Great Bible" Printed; The first English language Bible authorized for public use (80 books).

1560 AD: The Geneva Bible printed; The first English language Bible to add numbered verses to each chapter (80 books).

1568 AD: The Bishops Bible Printed; The Bible of which the King James was a Revision (80 books).

1609 AD: The Douay Old Testament is added to the Rheims New Testament (of 1582) Making the first complete English Catholic Bible; Translated from the Latin Vulgate (80 books).

1611 AD: The King James Bible printed; Originally with all 80 books. The Apocrypha was officially removed in 1885 leaving only 66 books.

1782 AD: Robert Aitken's Bible; The first English language Bible (KJV) printed in America.

1791 AD: Isaac Collins and Isaiah Thomas Respectively produce the first Family Bible and first Illustrated Bible printed in America. Both were King James Versions, with all 80 books.

1808 AD: Jane Aitken's Bible (Daughter of Robert Aitken); The first Bible to be printed by a woman.

1833 AD: Noah Webster's Bible; After producing his famous dictionary, Webster printed his own revision of the King James Bible.

1841 AD: English Hexapla New Testament; an early textual comparison showing the Greek and 6 famous English translations in parallel columns.

1846 AD: The Illuminated Bible; The most lavishly illustrated Bible printed in America. A King James Version, with all 80 books.

1885 AD: The "English Revised Version" Bible; The first major English revision of the KJV.

1901 AD: The "American Standard Version"; The first major American revision of the KJV.

1971 AD: The "New American Standard Bible" (NASB) is published as a "Modern and Accurate Word for Word English Translation" of the Bible.

1973 AD: The "New International Version" (NIV) is published as a "Modern and Accurate Phrase for Phrase English Translation" of the Bible.

1982 AD: The "New King James Version" (NKJV) is published as a "Modern English Version Maintaining the Original Style of the King James."

2002 AD: The English Standard Version (ESV) is published as a translation to bridge the gap between the accuracy of the NASB and the readability of the NIV.