

Our English Bible

A Historical Discussion on Bible Translation

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In what language was the Bible first written?¹

The first human author to write down the biblical record was Moses. He was commanded by God to take on this task, for Exodus 34:27 records God's words to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." And what language did he use? He wrote in his native language, called **Hebrew**.

Hebrew is one of a group of languages known as the Semitic languages which were spoken throughout that part of the world, then called Mesopotamia, located today mainly in Iraq. Their alphabet consisted of 22 letters, all consonants. (Imagine having an alphabet with no vowels! Much later they did add vowels.)

Almost the entire **Old Testament** was written in Hebrew during the thousand years of its composition. But a few chapters in the prophecies of Ezra and Daniel and one verse in Jeremiah were written in a language called Aramaic. This language became very popular in the ancient world and actually displaced many other languages. Aramaic even became the common language spoken in Israel in Jesus' time, and it was likely the language He spoke day by day. Some Aramaic words were even used by the Gospel writers in the New Testament.

The **New Testament**, however, was written in **Greek**. This seems strange, since you might think it would be either Hebrew or Aramaic. However, Greek was the language of scholarship during the years of the composition of the New Testament from 50 to 100 AD. The fact is that many Jews could not even read Hebrew anymore, and this disturbed the Jewish leaders a lot! So, around 300 BC a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek was undertaken, and it was completed around 200 BC. Gradually this Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, was widely accepted and was even used in many synagogues. It also became a wonderful missionary tool for the early Christians, for now the Greeks could read God's Word in their own tongue.

So the New Testament authors wrote in Greek. They did not, however, use really high-class or classical Greek, but a very common and everyday type of Greek. For many years some scholars ridiculed the Greek of the New Testament because many of its words were strange to those who read the writings of the great Greek classical authors such as Plato and Aristotle. But later many

¹ <http://www.ibs.org/bibles/about/11.php>

records were uncovered of ordinary people, and amazingly there were the same common terms used in everyday speech! The ridicule dried up accordingly.

The earliest copies of parts of the Hebrew Old Testament were discovered in 1947. They are part of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls and actually date back to the first century BC. Even though they are at least 900 years older than any parts of the Bible we had before this, they are not the originals. They are copies. The originals have all been lost or destroyed. But we are not at all doubtful that we may not have the original text. Copying by scribes was done with great care in those days and because the text was regarded as sacred, the copyists were extremely painstaking. Today some 5000 hand-copied documents exist of all or part of the Bible, and they agree in 98% of the text! No other ancient writing has this amount of underlying support with such amazing agreement as to the text.

Yes, we do have what God wanted us to have! By way of translation, we now have His revelation in our own language and in 2300 other languages, too. Today we have the very Bible that comes to us from the three languages used in the original. Truly we can say, "God speaks my language, too!"

The New Testament Manuscripts²

(Also see Addendum B to view pictures of the actual manuscripts)

Since early on Christianity took root among Greek-speaking Jews, the Bible of the earliest Christians was the Septuagint. For several decades, information about Jesus and Christian teachings circulated only in an oral format (for example, see [1 Corinthians 11:23-27; 15:3-8](#)). The earliest written documents that are now in the New Testament are the letters of Paul. These would have been written in the 50s and 60s of the first Christian century. Between AD 60-100, written accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus were compiled known as Gospels.

The earliest New Testament manuscripts were written on **papyrus**, which was an inexpensive form of paper that was not too durable. Today, only about a hundred papyrus manuscripts are in existence, most of which are mere fragments. A few substantial papyrus manuscripts have been discovered, such as the Beatty Papyri ([P45](#), [P46](#), and [P47](#)) and the Bodmer Papyri ([P72](#) and [P75](#)), all of which date from the second and third centuries.

After Christianity was legalized in the 300s, manuscripts began to be produced on dried animal skins called **parchment**. Some of the most famous parchment manuscripts are [Codex Sinaiticus](#)

(**a**), [Codex Vaticanus](#) (B), [Codex Alexandrinus](#) (A), [Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus](#) (C), and [Codex Bezae](#) (D), all of which date to the fourth and fifth centuries.

All of these early papyri and parchment manuscripts have been discovered since the 1800s. These early manuscripts of the Greek New Testament rarely had punctuation or even spacing between words. They also were written entirely in capital letters.

² <http://www.calbaptist.edu/jcate/cst100/Unit1.htm#NTmss>

No original copy of any New Testament book survives. Around 5,500 Greek New Testament manuscripts are in existence today. Around 150 of these date from the second to fifth centuries, but the vast majority of New Testament manuscripts come from a much later time period, mostly from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. Despite the large number of manuscripts available, no two of these completely agree as to the exact wording of the New Testament text. Most of the disagreements are minor, but several are sizable, such as [Matthew 6:13b](#); [Mark 16:9-20](#); [Luke 22:43-44](#); [23:34](#); [John 5:3b-4](#); [7:53-8:11](#); and [1 John 5:7-8](#).

When the wording of the text differs among manuscripts, textual specialists determine the most likely original wording based on the available manuscripts. Preference is given to the earliest manuscripts since they would be closer to the time of the writing and therefore have less chance of a change to occur. Most modern translations indicate differences between manuscripts in the margins or footnotes of the translation.

The New Testament Canon³

When the documents that now comprise the New Testament were originally written, only one community, the intended audience, would have known them. For example, in the AD 50s, only Christians in Rome would have known Paul's letter to the Romans. Eventually, churches began copying, circulating, and trading their copies of Paul's letters and the four Gospels. Because of this, these books were often used in worship and became accepted as scripture from the earliest stages of Christianity.

Besides the four Gospels and the letters of Paul, various church leaders for different reasons wrote other Christian documents between AD 70-150. These circulated and were used to different extents by various Christian communities. Some of these, such as 1 John, 1 Peter, and Acts, were used and accepted as scripture without much debate. Other writings were categorically rejected, usually because they were written by groups that had been excluded as heretics. Still other documents were disputed (that is, being accepted by some and rejected by others). The books listed in italics below eventually were excluded from the New Testament canon

³ <http://www.calbaptist.edu/jcate/cst100/Unit1.htm#NTcanon>

RECOGNITION OF EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS		
Books that were used and accepted widely:	Books that were disputed (accepted by some and rejected by others):	Books that were rejected widely:
Gospel According to Matthew Gospel According to Mark Gospel According to Luke Gospel According to John Acts of the Apostles Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy? 2 Timothy? Titus? Philemon 1 John 1 Peter	Hebrews James 2 Peter 2 John 3 John Jude Revelation of John <i>Epistle of Barnabas</i> <i>The Didache</i> <i>Shepherd of Hermas</i> <i>1 Clement</i> <i>2 Clement</i> <i>Revelation of Peter</i>	<i>Gospel of Peter</i> <i>Gospel of the Egyptians</i> <i>Gospel of the Hebrews</i> <i>Gospel of the Nazorenes</i> <i>Gospel of Thomas</i> <i>Infancy Gospel of Thomas</i> <i>Protoevangelium of James</i> <i>The Acts of John</i> <i>The Acts of Paul and Thecla</i> <i>The Acts of Peter</i> <i>Letter to the Laodiceans</i> <i>Third Corinthians</i>

Around AD 367, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, became the earliest known Christian to list the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Athanasius was not decreeing which books would comprise the New Testament. He was writing a letter about the date of Easter and offhandedly mentioned the twenty-seven books being used as the New Testament in Alexandria. This collection of twenty-seven books was later confirmed by other church leaders and eventually reached a consensus.

Many factors caused the acceptance of these twenty-seven books as the New Testament canon of scripture and the exclusion of all other books. The books of the New Testament were considered to contain orthodox or mainstream teachings while all heretical books were rejected. Church leaders also gave preference to the earlier books. As a result, some books such as the *Shepherd of Hermas* were excluded because they came from too late of a time period. Church leaders gave preference to books connected to a first-generation church leader. For example with the Gospels, Matthew and John were two of Jesus' twelve apostles. Mark was not, but he was a close friend of

Peter who was. Luke also was not an apostle, but he often traveled with the Apostle Paul. As a result of this, some books, such as *1 and 2 Clement*, were excluded from the New Testament canon because they were not as closely connected to an apostle.

Some books that eventually were included in the New Testament canon were originally disputed simply because they did not circulate widely. This was often due to shortness, such as with 2 John, 3 John, and Jude, or uncertainty about its authorship, such as Hebrews and 2 Peter. Eventually, twenty-seven books were considered to be the New Testament. This was not decreed through a church council. Probably more than any other single factor, the simple process of mass producing New Testament manuscripts after Christianity was legalized in the 300s led to these books being established as the final form of the New Testament canon.

The History of the Translation of the English Bible

(See also addendum A, English Bible History)

Historical Background: Reformation

A revolution in western thinking followed the midpoint of the 15th century A.D. The Renaissance opened up the treasures of both classical and patristic learning in a new way. It also revived an interest in the study of both Greek and Hebrew that made possible the study of the Bible in the original languages. This new interest in original editions stimulated textual research and also evidenced anew the corruption and ignorance of the contemporary church. The Renaissance created new opportunities for humanist scholars such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, who sought to make the Bible available to people of all ages, social levels, and countries.

More radical in outlook than Renaissance humanists were the Reformers, who measured the teaching and practice of the contemporary church by the standards of scripture. The Reformers were horrified by the obvious discrepancies. There soon emerged a mission to discover the pure biblical message and to reconstruct both the teaching and practice of the church. The Reformers became deeply convinced that it was both reasonable and necessary to circulate God's word in order to purify the church from ignorance and destructive practices. (from <http://davidsonpress.com>)

1525 William Tyndale's New Testament is completed. His translation is based on the Latin vulgate, Erasmus Greek and the original Greek manuscripts. His wording and sentence structures are found in most modern day translations of the Bible.

Tyndale was committed to taking the Bible directly to the people. Expressing open defiance of the Pope, Tyndale said that if God would spare his life he would make it possible for even a ploughboy to know more about Holy Scripture than the Pope himself. By August of 1525 his translation of the New Testament was complete. Printing began at Cologne, but when the authorities forbade the project, Tyndale escaped to Worms, where 6,000 copies were printed and

sold in England by April of 1526. Official opposition in England led to the destruction of most of these early copies.

Tyndale's English work is similar to that of Martin Luther. Although he used Luther's German translation, Tyndale also drew upon the Latin Vulgate as well as Erasmus' Greek text. Ninety percent of the New Testament in the King James Version (KJV) is Tyndale's translation. By the same token, where the KJV departed from Tyndale's wording, the English Revised Version (ERV) of 1881 went back to it. Without question, this first printed English New Testament is the basis of all future works of translation.

1536 Tyndale executed. Tyndale did not live to complete his Old Testament translation. On May 21, 1535, he was arrested and later executed for heresy at Vilvorde, Belgium, on October 6, 1536. His dying prayer was that the Lord would open the eyes of the King of England. He left behind a manuscript containing the translation of the historical books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles that was finally published in 1537.

1535 Myles Coverdale, student of Tyndale's, produces a Bible. It includes 80 books (The 39 Old Testament, 27 New Testament and 14 Apocrypha) His version uses the translations Tyndale was able to complete. Coverdale finished translating the rest of the Bible but not being a Hebrew or Greek scholar his portions are based on intermediate Latin and German translations rather than the original Greek and Hebrew.

1537 Matthews Bible printed. Matthews Bible is really Tyndale's translation supplemented by Coverdale's translation. Henry VIII through the efforts of Archbishop Crammer and Thomas Cromwell gave permission for this English version of the Bible to be bought and sold throughout Britain.

Historical Background Leading to King James (Protestant) and Rheims-Douay (Catholic) Bibles: It is during this time that the Protestant Reformers gain political power in England with the break-off from the Catholic Church by Henry VIII. The various Bible translations that follow are dependent upon the rise and fall of Protestant power. Mary Tudor is Catholic and during her time no new translations are permitted. Elizabeth is Protestant. Mary Stuart, never allowed to reign, is Catholic. Her son James who became King James I of England and King James VI of Scotland was raised in England by Elizabeth as a Protestant upon Mary Stuart's abdication of the crown of Scotland when James was one year of age.

1539 The Great Bible is called that because of its size but it is basically Matthews Bible and was authorized for public use. It contains 80 books including the Apocrypha as an appendix.

1546 Council of Trent is called to answer the accusations of corruption and apostasy in the Catholic Church by the Protestant Reformers. The Council meets over a 27 year period. One of the results is that Jerome's Latin Vulgate version of the Bible is held to be the official version of the Bible accepted by the Catholic Church.

1560 The Geneva Bible is printed. Verses are added for the first time in this edition. It is also the first translation of the Bible based entirely on the original Hebrew and Greek. It was

translated by exiles from England living in Geneva during the Catholic Mary Tudor's reign. The majority of the translation is attributed to William Whittington a relative of John Calvin.

1568 Bishops Bible produced. Because there was no "official" version of the Bible in England at this time, the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested the Geneva Bible be revised by the Bishop's to be used by all the churches. This is the version known as The Bishop's Bible

1609 Rheims-Douay Bible is the First Complete English Catholic Bible. Called Rheims – Douay because the New Testament portion was first completed in Rheims France in 1582 followed by the Old Testament finished in 1609 in Douay. In this version the 14 books of the Apocrypha are returned to the Bible in the order written rather than kept separate in an appendix.

1611 King James Version. The stated purpose of the King James translation was ""not to make a bad version good, but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one." It is primarily a re-translation of the Bishop's Bible. 54 men work on translation using all the widely accepted versions up to then including Bishop's, Geneva, Matthews, Coverdale and Tyndale translation as well as looking at original manuscripts. All available copies of the original manuscripts are brought in. It is found that the Hebrew manuscripts are virtually identical while there is a wide variation in the Greek manuscripts as they have been hand copied and handed down. The 54 men work as teams checking each other's work. It was printed originally with all 80 books including the Apocrypha again as a separate section.

1613-1901: At that time until today translations have continued as translators gained a better understanding of the Hebrew language and the Greek writers. 300 corrections were made in the 1613 version of the King James Version. In the 18th century Bishop Challoner made revisions to the Rheims-Douay Bible removing some Latin terms and adding the use of King James translation in some areas.

The Apocrypha were removed in 1885 from King James Versions when the English Revised Version was printed and in 1901 when the American Standard Version was printed.

Evaluating the Criteria of Modern Translations

New translations of the Bible into English continue to be made every year. In the United States, the most widely used English translations of the Bible are the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the New International Version (NIV). Dozens of other English translations have been made.

English translations can be evaluated according to several criteria.

First, consideration should be given to **the translation committee**. Normally, the translating committee publishes a preface at the beginning of the translation explaining their method of translating. Sometimes, a translating committee, such as with the NIV and the NRSV, even publish a book explaining their process of translating. The translating committee should be a large committee to prevent any personal bias of particular individuals being translated into the text. The committee should be well trained and widely recognized in the field of biblical studies. Ideally, the committee should be diverse in its cultural and religious backgrounds to prevent any

doctrinal bias being translated into the text. The Bible should be translated in a way that it speaks for itself, not the translators.

Second, a translation should be based on the earliest and best **Greek and Hebrew manuscripts** available. Virtually all English translations since 1900 are based on the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and the Greek New Testament (currently in its fourth edition), both of which are published by the United Bible Societies. These editions of the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament are based on the best available manuscripts and are recognized around the world as the standard from which translations should be made. The only modern English translation that does not use these texts is the NKJV. The NKJV has updated the language of the KJV, but it is based on the same inferior manuscripts as the KJV.

Third, a translation should be considered in light of its stated **purpose**. Some translations such as the NRSV, NIV, NJB, and NASB were intended for widespread use by Christians for faith and practice. Other translations had specific purposes other than widespread use, such as for readability or use by children.

Fourth, a translation should be considered in light of the balance between **formal and functional approaches** to translating the Bible. A formal approach is an attempt to render a literal translation of the Greek or Hebrew that even attempts to preserve word order. Since English is a language in which the function of words such as subjects, verbs, and objects is primarily dependent upon word order, Greek and Hebrew can become gibberish if word order is not adjusted into English. Word order in Greek and Hebrew often was due to emphasis, not grammatical function. Since there is no one-to-one correspondence between words in one language to words in another language, often individual words have to be translated with phrases or even footnotes explaining important alternate meanings.

A functional approach to translation is an attempt to paraphrase groups of words in one language into groups of words in another language. Translating the Bible with too much of a functional approach does not allow the English reader to grasp the precise wording of the text in the original languages. Often biblical writers placed a significant amount of emphasis on the very wording of a passage.

Ideally, a good English translation has a good balance between the formal and functional approaches. The goal is to bring good Hebrew and Greek into good English. Some translations such as the American Standard Version (ASV in 1901) intentionally tried to be on the formal end of the spectrum. Other translations such as the New Living Translation (NLT in 1996) intentionally attempt to be on the functional end of the spectrum. Translations made for widespread use in church, such as the NRSV, NIV, NJB, and NASB, attempt to be a balance between the formal and functional approaches.⁴

The NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

Version Information⁵

⁴ <http://www.calbaptist.edu/jcate/cst100/Unit1.htm#English>

⁵ <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/?action=getVersionInfo&vid=31>

The New International Version (NIV) is a translation made by more than one hundred scholars working from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. It was conceived in 1965 when, after several years of study by committees from the Christian Reformed Church and the National Association of Evangelicals, a trans-denominational and international group of scholars met at Palos Heights, Illinois, and agreed on the need for a new translation in contemporary English. Their conclusion was endorsed by a large number of church leaders who met in Chicago in 1966. Responsibility for the version was delegated to a self-governing body of fifteen Biblical scholars, the Committee on Bible Translation, and in 1967, the New York Bible Society (now International Bible Society) generously undertook the financial sponsorship of the project.

The translation of each book was assigned to a team of scholars, and the work was thoroughly reviewed and revised at various stages by three separate committees. The Committee submitted the developing version to stylistic consultants who made invaluable suggestions. Samples of the translation were tested for clarity and ease of reading by various groups of people. In short, perhaps no other translation has been made by a more thorough process of review and revision.

The Committee held to certain goals for the NIV: that it be an Accurate, Beautiful, Clear, and Dignified translation suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing, and liturgical use. The translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form. They agreed that faithful communication of the meaning of the original writers demands frequent modifications in sentence structure (resulting in a "thought-for-thought" translation) and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words.

In 1973 the New Testament was published. The Committee carefully reviewed suggestions for revisions and adopted a number of them, which they incorporated into the first printing of the entire Bible in 1978. Additional changes were made in 1983.

Available Versions

Language	Version	Available Versions
አማርኛ (AM)	Amharic Ebook Bible	PDF (NT)
العربية (AR)	Arabic Ebook Bible	PDF
	Arabic Life Application Bible	Text (NT)
Български (BG)	1940 Bulgarian Bible	Text
	Bulgarian Bible	Text
Cebuano (CEB)	Cebuano New Testament	PDF (NT)
Kreyol (CPF)	Haitian Creole Version	Text
Čeština (CS)	Slovo na cestu	Text (NT)
Dansk (DA)	Dette er Biblen på dansk	Text
Deutsch (DE)	Elberfelder	Text
	Hoffnung für Alle	Text (NT)
	Luther Bibel 1545	Text
English (EN)	21st Century King James Version	Text
	American Standard Version	Text
	Amplified Bible	Text
	Contemporary English Version	Text Audio (NT)
	Darby Translation	Text
	Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition.	Text (with Apocrypha)
	English Standard Version	Text Audio
	Holman Christian Standard Bible	Text
	King James Version	Text Audio (OT)
	New American Standard Bible	Text Audio
	New International Reader's Version	Text
	New International Version	Text Audio
	New International Version - UK	Text
	New King James Version	Text
	New Life Version	Text
	New Living Translation	Text
	The Message	Text
	Today's New International Version	Text Audio
	Worldwide English (New Testament)	Text (NT)
	Wycliffe New Testament	Text (NT)

	Young's Literal Translation	Text
Español (ES)	Biblia en Lenguaje Sencillo	Text (NT)
	Castilian	Text (NT)
	Dios Habla Hoy	Text (with Apocrypha)
	La Biblia de las Américas	Text Audio (NT)
	Nueva Versión Internacional	Text
	Reina-Valera 1960	Text
	Reina-Valera 1995	Text
	Reina-Valera Antigua	Text
فارسی (FA)	Farsi Ebook Bible	PDF
	Modern New Testament	Audio (NT)
Français (FR)	French Ebook Bible	PDF
	La Bible du Semeur	Text
	Louis Segond	Text
Κοινή (GRC)	1550 Stephanus New Testament	Text (NT)
	1881 Westcott-Hort New Testament	Text (NT)
	1894 Scrivener New Testament	Text (NT)
תּוֹרַת (HE)	The Westminster Leningrad Codex	Text (OT)
Ilonggo (HIL)	Hiligaynon Bible	Text
	Hiligaynon Ebook Bible	PDF (NT)
Hrvatski (HR)	Croatian Bible	Text (NT)
Magyar (HU)	Hungarian Károli	Text
Íslenska (IS)	Icelandic Bible	Text
Italiano (IT)	Conferenza Episcopale Italiana	Text (with Apocrypha)
	La Nuova Diodati	Text
	La Parola è Vita	Text (NT)
日本語 (JA)	Japanese Ebook Bible	PDF
한국어 (KO)	Korean Bible	Text
	Korean Living New Testament	PDF (NT)
Kurdî (KU)	Kurdish-Sorani Ebook Bible	PDF (NT)
Latina (LA)	Biblia Sacra Vulgata	Text (with Apocrypha)
Dholuo (LUO)	Luo New Testament	PDF (NT)
Māori (MI)	Maori Bible	Text
Malayalam (ML)	Malayalam Ebook Bible	PDF (NT)
Plautdietsch (NDS)	Reimer 2001	Text (NT) Audio (NT)
Nederlands (NL)	Het Boek	Text
Norsk (NO)	Det Norsk Bibelselskap 1930	Text
	Levande Bibeln	Text (NT)

Ndebele (NR)	Ndebele Ebook Bible	PDF (NT)
Português (PT)	João Ferreira de Almeida Atualizada	Text
	Nova Versão Internacional	PDF
	O Livro	Text
Română (RO)	Romanian	Text (NT)
Русский (RU)	Russian Ebook Bible	PDF (NT)
	Russian Synodal Version	Text
	Slovo Zhizny	Text (NT)
Slovenčina (SK)	1979 Slovak Bible	Audio (NT)
	Nádej pre každého	Text (NT)
Shqip (SQ)	Albanian Bible	Text
Svenska (SV)	Levande Bibeln	Text
	Svenska 1917	Text
Kiswahili (SW)	Swahili New Testament	Text (NT)
ภาษาไทย (TH)	Thai Contemporary Bible	PDF
Tagalog (TL)	Ang Salita ng Diyos	Text (NT)
Tiếng Việt (VI)	1934 Vietnamese Bible	Text
汉语 (ZH)	Chinese Ebook Bible	PDF
	Chinese Union Version (Simplified)	Text
	Chinese Union Version (Traditional)	Text

Quotes about Bible Translation and NIV

The following examples of general language translation come from the following video report link at IBSDirect.com

⁶You can find thousands of examples of changing the source word and/or syntax in order for the target language translation to make sense. One example of that is in Spanish.

Source Language:

Word-for-Word Translation:

Adding 2-words for increased meaning:

Best Spanish to English Equivalent translation:

Como Se llama?

How You Call?

*How **do** you call
yourself?*

What is your name?

Translations, by definition are not text based, but ‘meaning’ based, otherwise they will either not communicate the correct message, or not make sense at all.

The goal of Bible translation is to convey the meaning of the original source text into another language; in our case, contemporary English.

⁶ <http://www.ibs.org/bibles/about/translation/index.php>

⁷The NIV was translated by independent translators. This was ensured in 3 ways:

1. *They received only one mandate (from the original committee of pastors who commissioned the writing of a contemporary language English Bible). No other mandates were received from the committee.*
2. *There was no financial sponsorship of the translation process by any single denomination or religion.*
A written contract was signed to the effect that, although the Bible Society was the primary financial sponsor of the project, the translators would have the sole and final decision making power on the translation text itself.

Problems with the "KJV Only" Position⁸

This outline was covered in a lecture of the same topic at the March 1998 ACAP meeting.

1. The KJV originally contained the Apocrypha.

Thus, the Bible that KJV-Only advocates use omits thousands of verses originally contained in the original KJV (just over 5,700) – far more than the few verses found in the KJV but omitted in the NASB, NIV, and other modern translations (such as 1 John 5:7). The original KJV contained the Apocrypha which all Protestants currently deny, and which IS still part of the catholic Bible. It is true that the Apocrypha was widely regarded by Protestants in 1611 not to have the status of full canonicity. However, in the original 1611 edition no disclaimer was included in this regard (one was added in later editions). Furthermore, if the Apocrypha were to be included today, KJV-only advocates would vehemently object to its inclusion – a sure sign that its inclusion in the 1611 edition is a significant difference.

2. Even excluding the Apocrypha, the original KJV of 1611 differed slightly from editions of the KJV in common use today..

We are not referring here to spelling changes and the like, or to misprints in later, single editions. Usually the changes are improvements – for example, Matthew 26:36 now properly reads "Then cometh Jesus," where the original KJV read "Then cometh Judas." Not all the changes are for the better, though – for example, Matthew 23:34 in the KJV originally read "strain out a gnat," which is correct, while subsequent editions of the KJV to this day have "strain at a gnat." These facts prove that the extreme KJV-Only beliefs that even the slightest deviation from the wording of the KJV results in a false Bible is completely unrealistic. Please note that we are not claiming that the differences are vast or troubling from our perspective. We are simply pointing out that the position that the wording of the 1611 KJV is inviolable logically requires that modern editions of the KJV not be used.

3. The translators of the KJV did not believe in the KJV-Only doctrine.

⁷ Professor John H. Stek, Calvin Theological Seminary

⁸ http://www.inplainsite.org/html/the_king_james_version.html#BibleIdol

- a. They asserted that "the very meanest [i.e., most common or rude] translation of the Bible in English, set forth by men of our profession . . . containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God." In other words, any translation of the Bible by Christian scholars is the word of God.
- b. They understood their work as a translation of the original Hebrew and Greek text, contrary to some extreme KJV-Only advocates who maintain that the original Hebrew and Greek text is nonexistent and irrelevant.
- c. The KJV originally included marginal notes containing alternate renderings – making it clear that the wording of the KJV is not above correction or improvement. They admitted that there were Hebrew words that appeared only once in the whole Old Testament whose precise meaning was a matter of conjecture or debate.
- d. They also included variant readings – an extremely important point that contradicts the KJV-Only doctrine that the slightest variation from the KJV text results in an unreliable or false Bible. In at least one instance they placed half a verse in italics because they were unsure whether it was original (1 John 2:23b).
- e. They acknowledged that they exercised liberty in rendering the same Greek or Hebrew word in a variety of ways for stylistic purposes, again proving that they did not regard their wording as the only possible or acceptable rendering of the Bible.
- f. They took as a guiding principle the belief that the Bible should be translated into the "vulgar," or common, language of the people – implying that as the English language changes new translations may be needed.
- g. They asserted that there was value in having a variety of translations of the Scriptures.

4. The KJV Bible itself does not teach the KJV-Only Doctrine.

- a. No verse of the KJV indicates that there can be only one translation in any language. Much less does any verse of the KJV teach (as some KJV-Only advocates maintain) that there can be only one language version of the Bible at a time and that the only Bible in the world today is the KJV.
- b. The KJV does clearly teach that God's word is pure and that God promised to preserve his word. But in no verse does the KJV indicate that this preservation would occur without variant readings or renderings. To say that God's word is "pure" is not the same thing as saying that there can be no variations from one version of the Bible to another. It is, rather, simply to say that what God has said is absolutely reliable. But we must still determine precisely what God said. Did he say what is in the Apocrypha? Did he say 1 John 5:7? The purity of God's word is an axiom, but it does not automatically answer these questions.
- c. The KJV does teach that no one should add to or subtract from God's word. This does place a serious responsibility on the textual scholar and the translator; but it does not tell us which English version is correct about disputed verses such as 1 John 5:7.

5. The KJV-Only doctrine contradicts the evidence of the KJV Bible itself.

a. If the KJV-Only doctrine were true, we would expect that quotations from the Old Testament (OT) appearing in the New Testament (NT) would be worded exactly the same. But this is usually not the case in the KJV. Granted, God might legitimately inspire the NT authors to reword certain OT verses. But this explanation does not cover all the evidence.

b. The fact is that the vast majority of OT quotations in the NT differ at least slightly. Why would God inspire NT authors to reword OT statements routinely if there is only one legitimate wording for each OT verse?

c. In some cases in the NT the OT quotation is presented as what a person in NT times actually read, or could read, in his copy of the OT. For example, several times Jesus asked the Jews if they had never read a particular OT text – and then quoted it in a form that differs from the KJV (Matt. 19:4-5 [Gen. 1:27; 2:24]; Matt. 21:16 [Ps. 8:2]; Matt. 21:42 and Mark 12:10 [Ps. 118:22-23]; Matt. 22:32 and Mark 12:26 [Ex. 3:6]). If the Bible is properly worded in only one way and any variant is a corruption of the Bible, then Jesus was asking them if they had read something which, according to KJV-Only reasoning, they could not have read. Elsewhere we are told that a person read an OT text, where the KJV of that OT text differs from what appears in the NT quotation (Luke 4:17-19 [Isa. 61:1-2]; 10:26-28 [Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18]; Acts 8:32-33 [Isa. 53:7-8]). These facts prove that the OT text which the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus himself, the rich young ruler, and the Ethiopian ruler had differed in wording from the OT in the KJV.

6. The KJV-Only doctrine is not the historic belief of the Christian faith.

In the history of Christianity only two other versions of the Bible have ever been treated as the Bible, and even in these two cases not to the exclusion of other language versions. But those two versions were the Greek Septuagint (OT) and the Latin Vulgate, both of which (especially the latter) are typically rejected by KJV-Only advocates as perversions of the Bible. The Vulgate was treated as the only valid Bible for centuries by the Roman Catholic church in order to maintain uniformity in Bible reading and interpretation. Yet KJV-only advocates commonly regard the Septuagint and the Vulgate texts as false versions or "perversions" of the Bible. To be consistent, then, they must maintain that for over half of church history (over a thousand years) there was no Bible available to anyone outside a tiny number of scholars (if to anyone at all). In Protestantism the belief that the Bible may exist in multiple versions even in the same language has freed the Bible from the monopolistic control of the clergy or the theologians. The KJV-Only doctrine is a reactionary movement, limited almost exclusively to a segment of American fundamentalists (with much smaller followings in other English-speaking countries).

7. The KJV-Only doctrine does not fit the facts about the transmission of the Bible.

a. According to at least some versions of the KJV-Only doctrine, God preserved the Bible against any and all deviations, so that the true Bible has always been the same. But there is no evidence that this has happened. In fact the Bible and portions of it have been freely copied, re-copied, and translated with great freedom in the first five centuries of the church and in the last five centuries (so far). This resulted in many variations and deviations from the original text.

b. The copies of the first 1500 years or so of church history were all produced by hand, and no two extant manuscripts are completely alike. It is unrealistic to expect that before the printing press an absolutely unchanging text would be preserved by anyone – and the evidence from the extant manuscripts proves that in fact it did not happen.

c. In the case of the New Testament, the distinctive Greek text tradition on which the KJV was based, known as the Byzantine text, does not appear to have existed in the early church. The best evidence we have so far suggests that the Alexandrian text tradition is the earliest. This claim is vigorously rejected by KJV-only advocates, and the arguments pro and con are many and the issue too complicated for most non-scholars to follow and appreciate. However, a simple observation can here be made even here. For the KJV-only doctrine to be correct, in every place where the Byzantine and Alexandrian texts differ, the Byzantine must always be right. To base one's doctrine on such an unprovable and dubious assumption is not wise.

8. One need not adhere to the KJV-only doctrine to respect the KJV as God's word.

Many evangelical Christians greatly revere the KJV, read it, quote from it, believe it, and seek to live by it, who do not subscribe to the KJV-only doctrine.

9. One need not adhere to the KJV-only doctrine to express criticisms of other translations.

Many evangelicals who do not hold to the KJV-only doctrine have specific criticisms of other translations. For example, many evangelicals are critical of gender-inclusive translations such as the NRSV. Many evangelicals have pointed out weaknesses or problems in the NIV. Sober criticism of other translations assumes a humble perspective that recognizes that no translator or translators have produced a perfect translation and that translators who make mistakes are not necessarily corrupting God's word.

10. Advocacy of the KJV-only doctrine is no guarantee of doctrinal truth or interpretive accuracy.

A variety of Christian sects of American origin embrace the KJV in more or less exclusivistic fashion.

a. Arguably the "Ruckmanites," a fundamentalist Baptist movement that looks to Peter Ruckman as its primary spokesperson, is a distinct subgroup of American fundamentalism with almost cultish characteristics. Their basic theology seems sound enough, but it is overlaid with such extremism and legalism in its view of the Bible as to undermine its evangelical view of salvation.

b. Mormonism uses the KJV as its official Bible, even though Joseph Smith produced an "inspired" revision of the Bible (which some Mormons also use). The Mormons have a strong commitment to the KJV because it was the Bible of the early LDS prophets, the Book of Mormon quotes (indeed, plagiarizes) whole chapters from the KJV, and Mormons have found it convenient to use the KJV in evangelizing especially in English-speaking countries.

c. Many Oneness Pentecostals hold to a form of the KJV-only doctrine, especially on a popular level among pastors and laity. In their case they find it convenient to stick

with the KJV because in certain places its wording is more compatible with the way the Oneness doctrine is articulated than modern translations (e.g., Col. 2:9; 1 Tim. 3:16). Oneness Pentecostals often object to arguments based on the Greek or Hebrew as vain attempts to improve on the Bible.

11. The KJV-only doctrine requires that we have some sort of faith in the KJV translators.

KJV-only advocates constantly complain that if we don't have one sure Bible, the KJV, then we have to trust what scholars say about the text and its translation. But they are placing their faith solely in the KJV translators. A genuinely Protestant approach to the Bible requires that we not trust any one translator or translation team. Lay Christians can compare different translations to help get at the truth about any passage – or at least to become aware of possible disputes over the meaning of the passage.

12. Advocates of the KJV-only doctrine all too commonly exhibit a spiteful and disrespectful attitude toward other Christians.

Advocates of a hard-line KJV-only position commonly label all other translations (even the NKJV) "per-versions" of the Bible. They typically accuse anyone defending these other translations of lying, denying God's word, calling God a liar, and having no faith. While there are gracious, charitable advocates of the KJV-only doctrine, in general its advocates have earned a reputation for vicious name-calling, condescension, and arrogance. To quote the original 1611 edition of the KJV, these people "strain out a gnat and swallow a camel." While zealous to defend the KJV, they betray its teachings by failing to exhibit love toward fellow believers in Jesus Christ. All too often they imply that to be saved one must not only believe in Christ, but must also adhere to the KJV as the only Bible. A doctrine that fosters such bad fruit must be bad. There is nothing wrong with loving the KJV and believing it to be the best translation of the Bible. There is something very wrong with condemning other Christians for not sharing that opinion.

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Finally, there are many, many problems with a King James Version – ONLY approach to the scriptures. Beyond all of the evidence presented in the previous 17 pages, a very practical argument is that of communication and culture. Written scripture is not the presentation of God Himself. It's not even His words directly. Regardless of the translation, whether KJV, NIV, NLT, or several others, the words presented in written text are a conveyance of the thoughts, ideas, and the heart of God. To say that only one version has it right, is very presumptuous and arrogant, to say the least. Again, given the evidences above contrary to that position, it is even preposterous.

As well, the argument of the King James Version (KJV) being the only viable translation, flies in the face of common application of what the Word of God itself says. **2 Peter 3:9 declares:**

⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

If it is true that God is not willing that any should perish, and if we agree that the Bible is a primary key to the understanding of the gospel and a path to salvation and maturity in Christ, and if I agree that all people, in every culture, in every country; even those which do not understand written English should have access to the Word of God...then I cannot logically argue that only one Bible version, an English version is available to all of mankind, for all of time. As with the communications argument above, this position stands as presumptuous and arrogant, and is contrary to scripture itself.

⁹**Addendum A**

English Bible History

English Bible History



The fascinating story of how we got the Bible in its present form actually starts thousands of years ago, as briefly outlined in our [Timeline of Bible Translation History](#). As a background study, we recommend that you first review our discussion of the [Pre-Reformation History of the Bible from 1,400 B.C. to 1,400 A.D.](#), which covers the transmission of the scripture through the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, and the 1,000 years of the Dark & Middle Ages when the Word was trapped in only Latin. Our starting point in this discussion of Bible history, however, is the advent of the scripture in the English language with the “Morning Star of the Reformation”, John Wycliffe.



John Wycliffe

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!

⁹ <http://www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/>



John Hus

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

[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.



Thomas Linacre

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.



John Colet

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 tourists). Fortunately for Colet, he was a powerful man with friends in high places, so he amazingly managed to avoid execution.



Erasmus

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

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

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

[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

[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](#).



Thomas Cranmer

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**.



King Henry VIII

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.



Queen Mary

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.



John Foxe

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.



John Calvin

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.



John Knox

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.



King James I

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.



John Bunyan

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](#).



John Eliot

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. For more information on the earliest Bibles printed in America from the 1600's through the early 1800's, you may wish to review our more detailed discussion of [The Bibles of Colonial America](#).



Noah Webster

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.

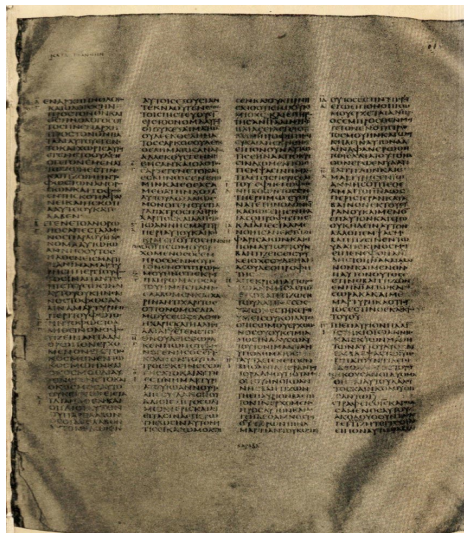
But equally dangerous, is the other extreme... of blindly rejecting ANY English translation that was produced in the four centuries that have come after the 1611 King James. We must remember that the main purpose of the Protestant Reformation was to get the Bible out of the chains of being trapped in 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.

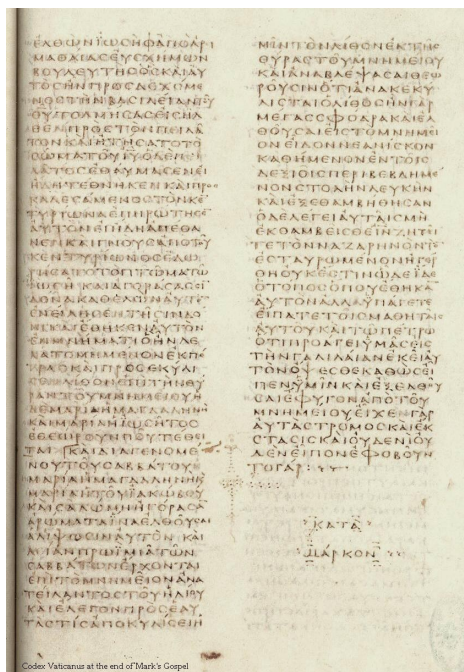
Addendum B

Some of the Most Famous Parchment Manuscripts

Codex Sinaiticus¹⁰



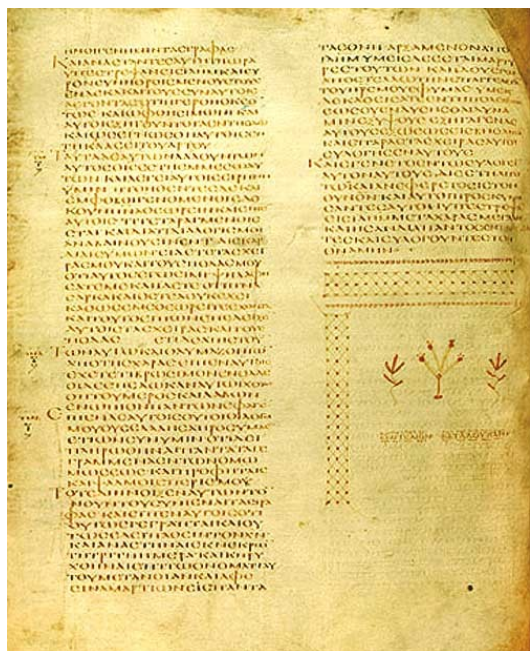
Codex Vaticanus¹¹



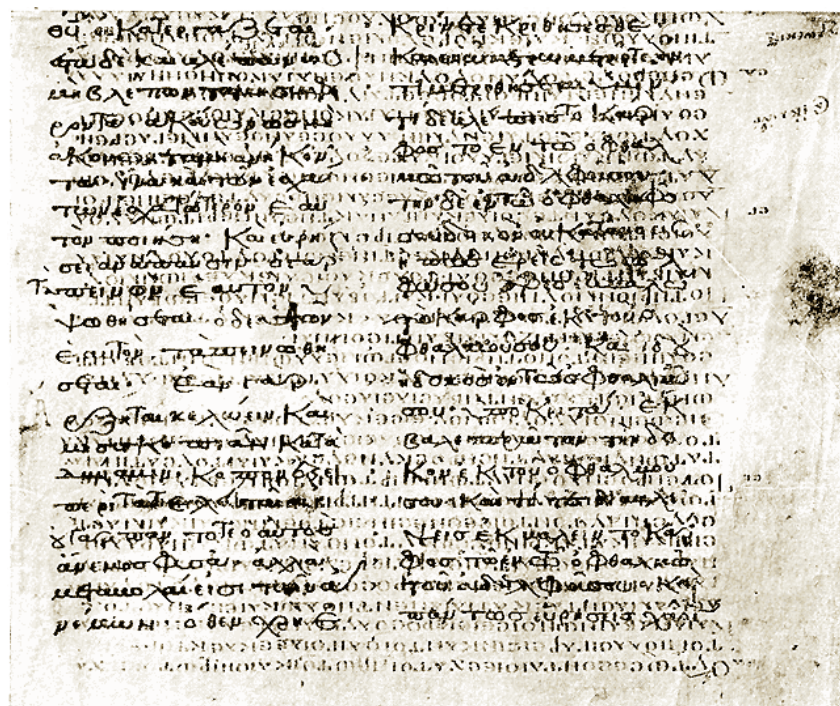
¹⁰ http://ba2.casd.sk/codex_velky.jpg

¹¹ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/vaticanus5.jpg>

Codes Alexandrinus¹²

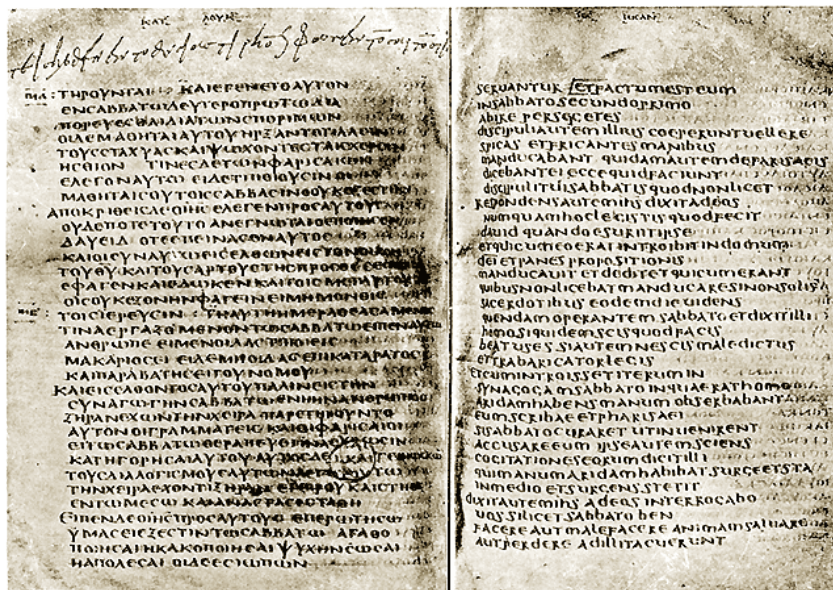


Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus¹³



¹² http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/graeca/Chronologia/S_post01/NT/nte_alex.jpg

¹³ <http://www.katapi.org.uk/images/MSS/Ephraemi-640w.gif>



¹⁴ <http://www.katapi.org.uk/images/MSS/Bezae-640w.gif>