

History of the Bible—3

For more information, including expanded handouts, visit: www.jmofiles.wordpress.com

The Printed Text & English Versions I

I. Process of bringing the Bible to people:

- (1) Experts evaluate and compare the manuscripts to recover the best possible text from the Hebrew and Greek.
- (2) Experts edit together the best possible text in printed form
 - Printed Hebrew Old Testament
 - Printed Greek New Testament
- (3) Translators work to translate the Bible into the common language
 - Translators use printed OT and NT
 - Translators consider new evidence: such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, NT papyri, etc.

II. Chapter and Verse Divisions

Chapter divisions were not added until very late, being first added by Stephen Langton (1150-1228), archbishop of Canterbury, England, to a copy of the Latin Vulgate. There were later added to the Hebrew text by Salomon ben Ishmael (c. 1330).

Current verse divisions in the NT were added by Robert Stephanus (Estienne) in 1551. Some of the verse divisions were purely random. According to Stephanus' son, his father made verse divisions on his journey from Paris to Lyons. There is an anecdote, although not true, which says Stephanus made random verse divisions while journeying on horseback -- which would fit the inappropriate verse divisions -- when the horse bumped his pen would hit the wrong place!

II. The Printed Greek NT Text (1500s—present time)

1450-1456: Johannes Gutenberg invents the movable type printing press. At the time, there were only about 12 Byzantine manuscripts available.

1516: Erasmus printed his *Novum Instrumentum*. Second edition (1519); third edition (1522); fourth (1527) and fifth (1535); his text is based on very late manuscripts.

1551: Stephanus puts verses in his 4th edition Greek text (Langton had already created chapters).

1519-1605: Theodore Beza made 9 editions of the Greek NT. His work is a very similar reproduction of the work of Stephanus. It agrees also with Erasmus. His work became a large basis (esp. editions of 1588-89, and 1598) for the KJV translators.

- 1633: The term *textus receptus* (“received text”) was coined when the printers, Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir, advertised their 2nd edition Greek text as “the text which is received now by all.” It later became almost heresy to criticize this text, which formed the basis of almost all translations until 1881. Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, as more and more ancient manuscripts were discovered, people began to question the Byzantine text and to develop rules for evaluating textual variants.
- 1881: Westcott and Hort publish *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, marking the end of the dominance of the *textus receptus*.
- Present: The world’s present standard Greek text is the United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament*, 4th revised edition, published in 1993. Word is out that a 5th edition is in the making (possibly along with the Nestle-Aland 28th edition).

III. English Translations before the King James Version

John Wycliffe (1325?-1384)

Began translating Bible from Latin into English with the help of some of his students.
Completed about 1382.

William Tyndale

‘Father of the English Bible.’ Translated from Hebrew and Greek. Fled to Germany and other regions. Imprisoned in Brussels in 1535. The next year he was burned at the stake, defending his convictions. Such convictions were due in part for the need of the word of God to be known to people in their own language. Tyndale was led to execution in Vilworde’s square where two great beams of wood had been placed in a cross. His last words, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.”

Coverdale Bible (1535)

Translated by Miles Coverdale, friend of Tyndale. His translation became the first in England to circulate without hinderance.

Matthew’s Bible

The work of John Rogers (pen-name Thomas Matthew), appearing in 1537. It was a combined edition of both Tyndale and Coverdale. It became known as the “Great Bible” and two years later it was revised by Coverdale and became the first authorized English Bible to be read in the churches.

Taverner's Bible (1539)

Independent revision of Matthew's Bible which had numerous improved readings in the New Testament.

Geneva Bible (1560)

Produced in Geneva, a safe place for English scholars and translators. This Bible became the Bible for the family. It also went under 140 editions.

Bishops' Bible (1568, 1572)

Since the Geneva Bible was unpopular with English church officials, a revision of Cranmer's Great Bible was started by English clergymen. This Bible never really had the scholarship nor the popularity of the Geneva Bible.

Rheims-Douai translation (1582, 1609-10)

The NT was translated from the Latin by Gregory Martin, but was compared to the Greek. This translation has many Latinisms and is difficult to read. Then in 1609-10 the Catholic Church released a new edition with the OT included. This version came too late to influence the KJV.

The first Roman Catholic English Bible. Because of the rise of English translations from Protestants, the Catholic Church was forced to make their own in English. It was translated from the Latin Vulgate, the Bible of the Catholic Church for so many centuries.

IV. King James Version — part 1

After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, King James (James I) came from Scotland to become the king of England. Soon after his arrival he learned of many complaints with churches—one being translations. At this time John Reynolds suggested a new Bible translation to begin; King James liked the idea.

There were about 54 translators for the KJV: Anglican, Puritan, and laymen. Some may have died during the process; others may have resigned. Six groups were divided up to translate books at:

- Westminster: to translate (1) Genesis—Kings; (2) Romans—Jude
- Oxford: to translate (3) Isaiah—Malachi; (4) Acts—Revelation; (5) 1 Chronicles—Ecclesiastes; (6) the Apocrypha

The translation process happened between 1604-1611.

The original KJV has a page with a dedication of it to King James. As far as we know King James didn't contribute anything toward this translation. At this time he was broke. But nonetheless the dedication was such.

Many don't realize the whole story. After the publication of the KJV, there were many people unhappy with the translation. It didn't happen overnight that people jumped for joy over the KJV and lived happily ever after. Some factors:

(1) Economic: Robert Barker had a monopoly for publishing Bibles under King James. After 1611, Barker had great control and investment in the KJV. There were no other rival translations. Only the KJV was available. Other translations were not easily available and imported translations were banned. Barker later died in 1645; his heirs inherited the printing rights. Other translations, therefore, were not available.

(2) Political: during Britain's revolution, King Charles was executed in 1649. The king owned the Bible. The monarchy went out of business at that point. With no king, anyone who desired to publish could do so. For a few decades there were many people publishing Bibles at that period. But, before the end of the century, the monarchy was reestablished with Charles II. By this time only the KJV was known among the people. The new king didn't have the enthusiasm that King James did. The KJV Bible was made because it was backed by the King James. But during the period when there was no king, there was no backing of the Bibles (no kings pushing the project) in the way King James did. The people became accustomed to what they had at the time. The KJV spread because of these realities. King James' goal of having only one Bible read throughout the nation had become a reality. But it became a reality by these factors that are often overlooked.

Right off there was unhappiness with the version. Hugh Broughton, a Hebrew scholar at the time, was not invited to participate with the translation. He gave a letter to the king saying the translation would grieve him as long as he lived: "I would rather be tied to wild horses and torn apart than this translation be given to the people."

Facts:

The NT is based on around 25 Greek manuscripts. Today over 5,000 manuscripts are known. In 1627 (after KJV was translated in 1611), Cyril Lucar presented Codex Alexandrinus (dated ca. 5th cent. CE) to Charles I in England. There have been very important manuscripts to emerge since the time of the KJV was translated, especially later in the 20th century.

The first edition of the KJV had mythological engravings added to opening pages. For example, Neptune is taming his sea-horses at the opening of Matthew 1. Revelation 1 has the same woodcut image.

❖ Note: The material here is presented as a survey, leaving out many details, such as the printed Hebrew OT, other English versions before the KJV, etc.