

# ENGLISH VERSIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

## Lesson One

### INTRODUCTION:

While the original copies were written in Hebrew, Greek with some Aramaic sections, the Bible in our English language must trace its beginnings to the Latin translations of the originals. Thirty-eight fragments, containing portions of almost every book in the New Testament, and dated A.D.150, were revised by the noted grammarian JEROME in A.D. 382. During the years A.D. 383-405, He spent time in Biblical research in Bethlehem and completed the Old Testament. The revision is known as the LATIN VULGATE (Language of the common man). For many years, this translation was the Bible of the Western world, and was used by the early English translators as the basis for their versions.

### I. ANGLO-SAXON CONTRIBUTIONS (A.D.600 – 1327)

- A. PARAPHRASE OF CAEDMON – Caedmon was a monk of Whitby, England and lived in the seventh century, and died A.D. 670-680 He turned the Bible stories into beautiful poems.
- B. ALDHELM – Bishop of Sherborne and translated into Early English the Psalms. He died in A.D. 709.
- C. GUTHLAC – hermit of Crowland, translated the Psalms during the days of Aldhelm. Along with Aldhelm’s works, his work on Psalms are now lost.
- D. BEDE – of Jarrow. Among other works, his last was the Gospel of John, which he translated just before his death in A.D. 735.
- E. ALCUIN ( 735-804) a pupil of Egbert, the bishop of York in Egbert’s school for ministers. In 782, Alcuin was called to Charlemagne’s court at Aachen (Germany today) to produce a standardized text of Jerome’s Latin Vulgate along with standardized interpretation. His work initiated a scholastic approach towards the Bible which endured for centuries, which shifted the accessibility of Scripture away from the common people.

He did develop a style of handwriting called Caroline minuscule, which incorporated both small and capital letters, making it easier to read than earlier manuscripts.

- E. ALFRED (Alfred the Great) – lived in A.D. 849-901. At the beginning of his “Book of Law” he translated the Ten Commandments. His work in the Psalms was stopped by his death.

- F. AELFRIC (955-1020)– translated the first seven books of the Old Testament, with some omissions and abridgements. He also produced homilies with Old Testament translations from Kings, Esther, Job and Daniel and from the Apocrypha, Maccabees. His attitude is found in this statement: “Happy is he, then, who reads the Scriptures, if he convert the words into actions.”.
- G. LINDISFARNE GOSPELS - Four Gospels in Latin transcribed by Eadfrith in the latter part of the seventh century, who became the Bishop of Lindisfarne. Some 250 years later in the middle tenth century, a priest by the name of Alred added an Anglo-Saxon “gloss” – word-for-word translation between the lines of the Latin text. It is the oldest existing copy of the Four Gospels in the English language. This work is kept in the British Museum.
- H. After the Norman Conquest in 1066, the Anglo-Norman dialect began to be spoken among the upper class. This had an impact on the Early English.
- I. ORMULUM – a monk of the order of St. Augustine and presented in the 1200’s a poetical version of the Gospels and Acts accompanied by commentary. This work was a manuscript of some 20,000 lines.
- J. WILLIAM OF SHOREHAM – In 1327, he presented the Psalms in English prose.

## II. WYCLIFFE’S TRANSLATION ( 1380 N.T.;1382 Entire Bible)

- A. John de Wycliffe (Wyclif, Wiclif, etc.). was born in 1329 in Yorkshire. He died on the last Sunday in 1384 while at Mass at Luttenworth, where he suffered a Paralytic stroke. He and his followers were called “lollards” which were heretics because of their opposition to the religious hierarchy. In 1377, he was summoned before the Convocation at St. Paul’s to address charges of erroneous teaching, and again he was put on trial in 1382.
  - 1. His attitude: “It helpeth Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ’s sentence.”
  - 2. He is denounced: Archbishop Arundel in his letter to Pope John XXIII in 1411: “This pestilent and wretched John Wyclif, of cursed memory, that son of the old serpent...endeavoured by every means to attack the very faith and sacred doctrine of the Holy Church, devising – to fill up the measure of his malice – the

expedient of a new translation of the Scriptures into the mother tongue”  
(The Journey From Texts to Translations, p. 282)

- B. In 1380, Wycliffe translated the New Testament and in 1382 the entire Bible from the Latin (Vulgate) to English. In Wycliffe’s first Edition, Nicholas Hereford assisted him, and was excommunicated and imprisoned. After Wycliff’s death, John Purvey, along with other helpers, revised Wycliff’s first Edition in 1388. Purvey himself suffered imprisonment in 1390 and 1421. This later version had many notes and primarily a “gloss” by Nicholas of Lyra, an eminent fourteenth century scholar. Despite attempts to destroy all copies, more than 170 copies are extant.
- C. Example of two versions on John 7:17:
1. Early version (1380): “If any man schal wilne to do this wille, he schal knowe of the techinge, wher it be of God, wher I speke of my silf.”
  2. Later version (1388): “If any man wole do his wille, he schal knowe of the techyng, whether it be of God, or y speke of my silf.”
  3. Matt. 6:9-13): “Oure fadir that art in hevenes, halowid be thi name. Thi kyngdom come to. Be thi wille done in erthe as in hevене. Geve to us this day oure breed over otheri substaunce. And forgeve to us oure dettis, as we forgiven to our dettouris. And lede us not in temptacioun, but delyver us from yvel. Amen. (Wycliffe Bible, 1382).
- D. Reception of Wycliff’s Translation
1. Some of the friends of Hereford and Purvey were burned at the stake with Bibles tied around their necks.
  2. Through the influence and support of Archbishop Arundel, a synod of Oxford in July 1408 forbade the reading of Wycliffe’s Bible.
  3. People caught reading Wycliffe’s Bible were liable of forfeiture of their “land, cattle, life and goods”. Yet, it is also recorded that the price for borrowing a Wycliffe Bible to read for a set time was “a load of hay” .
  4. In 1415, the Council of Constance condemned John Huss (1371-1415) a reformer in Bohemia and follower of Wycliffe, to be burned at the stake. Wycliffe’s bones were ordered to be dug up and burned, and his ashes were carried out to the sea.

### III. HISTORICAL OCCURENCES FROM WYCLIFFE TO TYNDALE

- A. Discovery of “Movable Type’ in (1440).
- B. In 1455-1456, the Mazarin Bible (Edition of Latin Bible) was presented to the public by John Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany.
- C. Between 1470-1500, ninety-one editions were issued of the Bible.

### IV. WILLIAM TYNDALE’S TRANSLATION (1526- N.T.; 1534 O.T. portions)

- A. William Tyndale was born in 1494 in Gloucestershire. He spent his days devoted to the dream of presenting the Scriptures to the common man. The following is attributed to him during one of his conflicts with the hierarchy: *“If God spare my life ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the scripture than thou doest.”* After fleeing to Cologne from England, he made plans to issue a translation in the English language. In 1526, from Worms, the New Testament was printed and many editions were smuggled into England where they were seized by authorities.
- B. Tyndale relied upon a Greek text first printed in 1516 by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Luther, in his translation of the New Testament, relied heavily upon Erasmus’ second edition (1519). Erasmus’ third edition (1522) was the basis for Tyndale’s.
- C. While working on his Old Testament translation, Tyndale was imprisoned. After suffering imprisonment for months, he was finally sentenced to death. On October 6, 1536 he was strangled at the stake and his body was burned to ashes. His last words are reported to be, “Lord open the King of England’s eyes.”
  - 1. Less than a year later in 1537, King Henry VIII granted the permission for an English version of the Bible to be printed.
  - 2. It was largely Tyndale’s version.
- D. Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament was revised in 1534 and 1535. In 1530, and 1531 Tyndale’s work on the Pentateuch and Jonah was completed. He was imprisoned before his work on the Books of Joshua – 2 Chronicles could be published.
  - 1. Concerning his revision of 1534, printed at Antwerp, he entitled it “The Newe Testament dylygently corrected and compared with the Greke by Willyam Tindale.”

2. Revision had fewer marginal notes and shorter introductions to each book.
3. Nine-tenths of the King James Authorized Version of the New Testament is still Tyndale's.
4. English ecclesiastical authorities did their best to destroy every trace of the Tyndale's Bible. Of the quarto edition, begun at Cologne and ended at Worms, only one solitary fragment exists comprising eight out of the ten leaves printed at Cologne with the texts of Matt. 1:1-22:12. It is now in the British Museum. Of the octavo, one perfect copy exists. An imperfect copy is in St. Paul's Cathedral. This is all of the 6,000 copies which Tyndale is said to have printed in 1525 at Worms.
5. In 1996, another copy of the Tyndale New Testament (1925) was found in a library in Stuttgart Germany by Dr. Eberhard Zwink.

**V. THE COVERDALE BIBLE (1535)**

- A. Miles Coverdale was born in 1488 in North Yorkshire. He little of the Hebrew and Greek so he relied upon the Vulgate, Luther's Bible, Latin translation by Pagninus Swiss-German bible published in Zurich, and most of all, Tyndale's translation.
- B. From the printing presses in Cologne on October 4, 1535, Coverdale's translation and England's first complete Bible was presented.
- C. During Coverdale's days, things were changing in England. In 1531, King Henry VIII assumed the title of supreme head of the Church of England (the Anglican Church) In 1534, Henry married Anne Boleyn and the papal authority in England was formally annulled. The desire of the times was to bring a translation to the English speaking people in order for them to read. Coverdales' first edition did not have the King's express license, but his second and third editions did: "Sett forth with the kyniges most gracious license."
- D. Coverdale's translation was the first English Bible to introduce chapter summaries, and to divide the Apocrypha books from the canonical books. The Apocrypha books had been scattered through the Old Testament in the Septuagint and Latin Vulgate.
- E. Coverdales' Bible was reprinted twice in 1537, and once in 1550, and 1553.

**VI. MATTHEW'S BIBLE (1537)**

- A. John Rogers issued this translation under the pen name of *Thomas Matthew*. His translation was influenced by Tyndale's and Coverdale's translations. For the next 75 years, all other versions were based upon this one. In 1539, Richard Taverner revised the translation. In his revision, he relied upon the Vulgate principally for the Old Testament. Taverner's revision was allowed to be read publicly in the churches.
- B. When England reverted to Catholicism under Mary Tudor, Rogers was one of the first to be burned at the stake in 1555.

**VII. THE GREAT BIBLE (1539)**

- A. While Coverdale was exiled in Paris, he was appointed by Cromwell to revise the Matthew Bible in order to present a Bible for every church. In April of 1539, the first edition came off the press. Its pages were 16 and ½ inches long and 11 inches wide thus giving its name "Bible of the largest Volume" or "Great Bible". Six copies from the editions of 1540 and 1541 are extant today. An elaborate cover page picturing King Henry VIII, Archbishop Cranmer and Secretary of State Cromwell characterizes this large volume.
  - 1. The first English translation to be authorized for public use in churches.
- B. In 1543, by an Act of Parliament, the reading of the Bible was restricted to certain classes. Tyndale's and Coverdale's translations were banned. During this time the early works were greatly destroyed. During the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary (1553-1558) many copies of the Bible were burned.

**VIII. THE GENEVA BIBLE (1560)**

- A. Scholars of the Geneva Bible revised thoroughly the Great Bible especially the Old Testament books that Tyndale did not translate. The New Testament was primarily Matthew's revisions of Tyndale's Bible with some changes based upon the Great Bible and Beza's Latin New Testament of 1556. It divided the entire text into verses.
- B. During Mary Tudor's reign, Protestant scholars fled from England. One of these scholars, William Whittingham, brother-in-law of John Calvin's

wife, was one of the principal translators of the Geneva Bible. He had produced an English version of the New Testament in 1557.

- C. This translation became popular in the homes. This was the Bible that was used by Shakespeare. Before his producing *PILGRIMS PROGRESS*, John Bunyan meditated upon this Bible. The Geneva Bible was printed and presented to Elizabeth I during her reign, following the death of Mary Tudor.
- E. The marginal notes were strongly Calvinistic in doctrine. They also expressed anti Roman Catholic sentiments such as the beast ascending from the pit in Revelation 11:7 being identified as “the Pope which has his power out of hell and cometh thence.”

#### **IX. THE BISHOP’S BIBLE (1568)**

- A. This version was produced in response to the Catholic Church’s problems with the Geneva bible’s terminology and apparent Calvinistic slant. After Archbishop Matthew Parker issued the request to revise the Great Bible to various “bishops”, on October 5, 1568, their revision was presented.
- B. The directions for revision: “...follow the common English translation used in the churches (the Great Bible) and not to recede from it but where it varieth manifestly from the Hebrew or Greek original...to make no bitter notes upon any text or yet to set down any determination in places of controversy.”
- C. After the first edition, some thirty errors were found in the first three Gospels. A second edition was issued in 1569. In all, some forty editions of this Bible was issued. In 1606, the last edition was issued.
- D. The Bishop’s Bible served all the churches of England for the next 43 years. This Bible is also divided into verses like the Geneva Bible.

#### **X. DOUAY - RHEIMS VERSION (1582 – N.T.; 1609-1610- O.T.)**

- A. William Allen, a devout Roman Catholic, established a college at Douay, France in 1568. Due to his support for the Spanish to conquer England and subject it to the rule of the Catholic Church tensions resulted. This caused him to move his college to Rheims in 1578. He returned to Douay in 1593.

- B. While at Rheims, George Martin, lecturer, began translating the Latin Vulgate into English. The New Testament was published in 1582 in Rheims. The Old Testament was published 1609-1610 at Douay.
- C. The translators acknowledge their intent: “To meet the Protestant challenge, priests must be ready to quote Scripture in the vulgar tongue since their adversaries have every favourable passage at their fingers’ ends; they must know the passages ‘correctly used by Catholics in support of our faith, or impiously misused by heretics in opposition to the Church’s faith’” (The Journeys From Texts to Translations, p 304).
- D. The apocryphal books are found among the canonical books, just like the Latin Vulgate. In some places the Greek text was relied upon, instead of merely the Latin Vulgate, due to its use of the Greek article. The Latin language does not have the definite article, but it occurs in the Catholic translation. Much of the criticism about the translation is that it “Latinizes” the English. As some scholars remark, it is a translation that “needs to be translated.”
- F. Roman Catholic doctrine is definitely seen in the translation:
1. “Whatsoever thou shalt *supererogate*, I, at my return will repay thee.” (Lk. 10:35)
  2. Translators chose the translations “do penance” instead of “repent”.
  3. Paul and Barnabas ordained “priests” in every church instead of “elders” (Acts 14:23)
- G. The text was revised by Bishop Richard Challoner of London in 1750. This was to bring it into conformity with the authorized versions of the Latin Vulgate (Sixtine, and Clementine editions). This revision was authorized for use by English speaking Roman Catholics of America in 1810. A revision was announced by Pius X in 1907. Cuthbert Lattey presented the Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures in several editions between 1913-1935.

#### CONCLUSION :

With the Protestants producing their Geneva Bible and the Catholics reacting with their Douay – Rheims translation, controversy set the stage for the King James Bible to appear. While the Bishop’s Bible was an improvement over the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible was superior to both, none was universally embraced by all the factions with the English Church. King James I tries to solve this problem.

Our next lesson will begin with the history of the King James Version and the consequent English Versions up to our time.