

**I. THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES (or Old Testament)**

Origins - The Apocrypha - The Dead Sea Scrolls - The Septuagint

**II. THE GREEK SCRIPTURES (or New Testament)**

Origins – Canonization - Manuscripts

**III. MAJOR POST-BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Latin began to replace Greek as the dominant language of the Roman Empire
- There was an increasing desire for the Bible in Latin; the first OT translations were from the Greek (Septuagint), and so were a translation of a translation (more accurately, a paraphrase). The NT was from the Greek. There were several versions attempted and popularized.

**Church Councils**

- Christianity had been declared as the official religion of the Roman Empire by Constantine in 313, ending the last and worst persecution of Christians. Constantine had been "converted" to Christianity in 312, and moved to joining together the Christian Church and the Roman Empire, dramatically changing what Christianity had been up until that time.
- Through this more public and accepted form of Christianity (which eventually became compulsory), there were more official pronouncements through church councils that would officially recognize the full New Testament.
- Athanasius, bishop in Alexandria (Egypt) and defender against Arius (who denied the divinity of Christ) had given his canon in 367, followed by councils in Nicea (325-340), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397 and again in 419) all of which included all 27 books of the NT as we now know it.
- We could look at these events in a couple of ways. We could view it from a merely human perspective, and think that it was merely the will of men deciding on those texts which best fit their teachings, imposing them on others, and exercising worldly power.
- Or, we could see that though the church structure and "official" nature of the Roman church that had developed were God's providential ways of making the contents of the NT indisputable through His sovereignty. While we would not want again that kind of church (political), God used it to solidify and propagate His Word for the future.

**The Latin Vulgate**

- Damasus, bishop of Rome (366-384), commissioned his secretary Jerome to create a new Latin "standardized" translation. Jerome was hesitant, knowing it would be controversial, but eventually succumbed to the task.
- He began with the Gospels, then Psalms, then the remainder of the NT. He then mastered the Hebrew language so that he could translate from the Hebrew OT to Latin, completing his work in A.D. 405. This became known as the Latin Vulgate (Def. common language, vernacular, popular).
- It was not received at first by many because of its divergence from other versions, but eventually became standard edition. It was this translation of the Scripture through which the Gospel arrived in Western Europe. For many centuries this was the only "authorized" version. This was true no matter what the common language was into which the church came. It is only fairly recently that the Roman Catholic Church allowed for non-Latin masses.

**The Place of the Monasteries**

- Another important point is that in these early years the monastery, those places in which orders of Monks lived, was the primary repository for the manuscripts. There they were kept and copied. Many years later, as old manuscripts were again taken interest in, some of the oldest manuscripts were found, kept by the providence of God.

**IV. THE ENGLISH BIBLE****Early Translations**

- After the production of the Latin Vulgate, any translation that was made was translated from it (as opposed to the Hebrew and Greek). As the Gospel penetrated other cultures and languages, translations were made into those others languages. Most of the time these translations only consisted of portions of the Bible. One of the goals was to get the Gospel to a people in their own language only as much as was need to establish a Latin Mass (worship service).
- Yet, there were always those who were pushing to have all of Scripture in the common tongue. There was often resistance to this for a couple of reasons. There was an increasing sense of authoritarianism among the leadership of the church, and it was believed that only the church scholars could truly understand and interpret the Bible for the people. There was also the reality that most of the common people were not literate. This is when the usage of images and icons became common.
- While there was a growing sense of authoritarianism, there were those who believed that one of the most important tasks of Christianity was education, and teaching literacy. The purpose of this is that the people would not be in ignorance, but be able to read the Word of God for themselves. This concerned many church leaders, who felt the people were too ignorant, and that this would disrupt the unity of the church.

**Wycliffe**

- One of the men that God raised up that would oppose this way of thinking was John Wycliffe (c.1330-1384). Wycliffe was a distinguished scholar and preacher at Oxford in England. Wycliffe saw the feudal society (two-class lords/servants, but not slavery) as a problem. He believed that this system was also reflected in the church and people's relationship with God. Not only did he believe that there should be a change in society, but also in the

church. One primary way this was to happen was to have the Word of God available to all people. So he and his companions, against the will of the church leaders at large, undertook to translate and distribute the Scriptures.

- His (and his associates) translation was from the Latin Vulgate, and had to be done by hand. These men, known as the Lollards, went about preaching and distributing Scriptures. He was so hated that several decades after his death he was condemned as a heretic, his body dug up, and his ashes thrown into the Swift River.

### Revival of Learning and the Printing Press

- From about 1450 and beyond there was a surge of interest in classical and biblical learning. During this same time (c.1456) Johann Gutenberg is credited for the invention of the moveable type printing press which was a technological advancement beyond our imagination. Up until this time the Bible was copied by hand, and there were some magnificent editions that had been created for the very wealthy, called “Illuminated Bibles.” These were exquisite copies with ornate borders and illustrations.
- With the moveable type press, large quantities of books could be printed for the first time in history, and this opened the door for greater learning. The first large writing that Gutenberg published was his Mazarin Bible (in Germany). It took a total of 5 years to produce this Bible, and was printed in two volumes.

### Tyndale

- The next major figure in the history of the English Bible is William Tyndale (c.1495-1536). After Tyndale was trained at Oxford and Cambridge, he devoted himself to a translation of the Scriptures into English, not from the Latin but from the Greek and Hebrew. In this his translation differed from Wycliffe. Also, unlike Wycliffe, he was able to use the technology of the printing press to distribute his work. This English edition in one sense became the foundational English translation from which others came.
- Tyndale was strongly opposed by the Roman Catholic church, and was eventually arrested and imprisoned. He was, after a year in prison, tried and condemned to death. He was strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536.

### Erasmus' Greek New Testament

- In this same time period a man named Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466-1536) had taken an interest in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and began to assemble all that he could find for the purpose of printing a “critical” edition of the Greek New Testament. This was published in 1516, just one year before the beginning of the Reformation. He was both a friend and an opponent of the Reformation in various ways. While he was seeking to spread learning of the Bible, he also opposed certain Martin Luther's teachings about the will of man. This was due to Erasmus' commitment to Humanist ideas, putting an imbalanced emphasis on the freedom and will of man (as opposed to Luther's view of the fallenness of man).

### Other Significant English Bibles

- In the following years significant translations were produced by Miles **Coverdale** (a friend and associate of Tyndale). While Tyndale was only able to complete the NT and parts of the OT, Coverdale finishes his work and there is the printing of the first complete English Bible.
- During the time of the Reformation, King Henry breaks from the Roman church and commissions the printing of an English Bible that is to be placed in every church in England. This was called **The Great Bible**, due to its size. Because of its value, this Bible would be chained in the church buildings. Whereas previously the RC church had sought to keep the Bible away from the common people, there was a turn to a desire to make it available to all in their own language. This became the official Bible for the churches in England for several years (from 1539-1611).
- The translations that followed this time include the **Geneva Bible** (a product of scholars in Protestant Scotland). This Bible became very popular among Reformed churches, and was the Bible brought with the Pilgrims to the New World. The Bishops Bible was produced in England and sponsored by the official church of England.
- In 1603 a conference was convened by James IV of Scotland became James I of England, and out of that came the commissioning of what is known as **The King James Version**. A group of 47 scholars was assembled and presented the version in 1611 (which included the Apocrypha). This version has been particularly recognized for its supreme English style. Though initially resisted, it eventually became hugely popular. Interestingly, many of the Puritans (and as already mentioned the English Pilgrims) continued to use the Geneva Bible.
- While this might seem like a lot of translations at so early a date, much of the reason for this was ecclesiastical. That is, due to the variety of Protestant denominations and beliefs, these versions were produced. However their similarity and relatedness should not be underestimated. Many of them were primarily revisions of the others.

## V. LATER MANUSCRIPT DISCOVERIES

- Over the years, Greek manuscripts continued to be discovered and added to the evidence for the purpose of comparison. During the time of Erasmus and following, there is what is known as the Textus Receptus, or received text. In more recent years, older manuscripts have been discovered, and there is ongoing debate as to the merit and accuracy of “families” of manuscripts. This is what you will see in the center margins of your Bibles.
- Despite the multitudes of debates, I don't think there are easy answers, for even within families of manuscripts there are variations. Yet, as I mentioned last week, we should not overemphasize the differences, but recognize the amazing unity.
- More than anything, I want us to appreciate and read the Scriptures. I hope we can feel the weight of the sacrifice that has been made for us, and that both learning and reading would be precious to us.