

A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

Text Traditions (Types?)

- The Masoretic Text (MT)
 - Drawing its name from the Hebrew *masorah* (“tradition”) and derivatively the Masoretes, the “Masoretic text” is the dominant text type for the Hebrew Bible.
 - The Masoretes were the first scribes/copyists to insert vowel pointings into the Hebrews text as the language became increasingly unspoken.
 - The Aleppo and Leningrad codices both represent the particularly excellent Ben Asher family of scribal transmission.

Text Traditions (Types?)

- The Samaritan Pentateuch
 - The Samaritan Pentateuch dates to about 400 BC when the Samaritans separated themselves from the Jews and built their own sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim.
 - While there are many differences in the Samaritan and Masoretic Pentateuchs, with the vast majority being spelling and grammar discrepancies. Nevertheless, many scholars believe those differences are enough to establish a separate, ancient text type from which it was copied.
- Others
 - The Septuagint (i.e., the Greek “translation” of the OT to be discussed in the next module) seems to have been translated from a different textual tradition (e.g., the Septuagint version of Jeremiah is 1/8 shorter and the oracles against the nations are placed after 25:13).
 - 4QSam^a and 4QSam^b
 - Fragmentary manuscripts of 1 and 2 Samuel found at Qumran and dating as early as 300 BC, 4QSam^a and 4QSam^b seem to preserve (in agreement with the Septuagint) different, and in some cases better readings than the Masoretic text.

The Hebrew Text Today

- Almost all modern versions of the Hebrew Testament are based primarily on the Masoretic Text, particularly as it is represented in the Leningrad codex. In the few cases where there are meaningful textual discrepancies within the manuscript tradition, textual critics carefully weight both the internal and external evidence for variant readings.
 - Roberts: “...the authenticity of the Masoretic text stands higher than at any time in the history of modern textual criticism, a standpoint which is based on a better assessment of the history of the Jewish transmission.”
 - The Hebrew Bible used for most scholarly work is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), currently in its fourth edition.

The Septuagint (LXX)

- Latin for “according to the 70,” the Septuagint was likely the greatest translational achievement in the ancient world. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the OT (including apocryphal works) and was the primary “Bible” referenced by Jesus and the apostles.
 - *The Letter of Aristeas*
 - Regardless of what one thinks of Aristeas’s account, the Pentateuch was likely completed in the third century BC.
- The creation of the Septuagint never seems to have been a strict, unified preservation of the Hebrew text. Sometimes, differences are considerable. For example:

The Septuagint (LXX) Cont...

- Exodus 35-40 is arranged differently in the Septuagint than the Hebrew.
 - Judges preserves two forms of the Greek text.
 - Jeremiah is one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew and the oracles against the nations are placed after 25:13.
- Despite differences, the Septuagint differs very little in *substance* from the Hebrew text, even when it gives a better (i.e., more likely original) reading.
- Lightfoot: “Because it is a translation the Septuagint remains secondary. Only with great care, then, can one speak of ‘the authority’ of the Septuagint.”
 - Frame: “When Jesus and the apostles quote the OT using the LXX version, their intent is not to assert the authority of the LXX as a translation, but quote what is said in the OT autographic text. The LXX is only a vehicle for accomplishing that, a good means of communicating to people who know Scripture primarily through the LXX.”
- Our names for the books of the Pentateuch come from the Septuagint through the Latin Vulgate, as well as dividing books such as Samuel and Kings into two parts

Aramaic Targums

- Nehemiah 8:8: “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”
 - This appears to be the first recorded reference to an oral paraphrase, or a *targum*. Aside from general paraphrase, the Aramaic Targums seem to particularly paraphrase references to God. (e.g., “I saw the glory of the Lord” in Isa. 6:1 or “the sound of the word of the Lord God walking in the Garden in Gen. 3:8).

Syriac and Coptic Translations

- Syriac Translations

- Though there are five ancient Eastern Aramaic—or Syriac—translations, only one has preserved the OT: the *Peshitta* (“the simple version”). The *Peshitta* is still used today in the Syrian Orthodox churches and contains a 22 book New Testament canon.

- As an important witness in establishing the original text as an independent line of transmissional attestation, the Syriac goes back to the late second-century at very earliest and largely reflects a Western text-type.

- Coptic Translations

- As the last form of the ancient Egyptian language, Coptic translations arose early, particularly as Christianity spread to, and out from, Alexandria.

Latin Translations | Old and 'Vulgar'

- Prior to the Vulgate, Old Latin translations began to emerge as early as the mid-late second century (ca. 180?), likely originating from northern Africa and then Italy.
 - The Old Latin (*Vetus Latina*) translations (generally thought to preserve a Western text-type) are characterized by wildly variant readings, many of which are contained in Codex Bezae.
- The Latin Vulgate
 - Largely because of the chaotic state of the Old Latin manuscripts, in 382 AD Pope Damasus commissioned the greatest biblical scholar of that time, Jerome, to take the Old Latin manuscripts and create a revised Latin translation.

Latin Translations Cont...

- Using the Old Latin but comparing them with Greek manuscripts, Jerome revised the four Gospels using an Alexandrian text type. It is unclear to what degree, if at all, he revised the rest of the New Testament. At best, it seems his revision of the rest of the NT seemed to correct the Old Latin less and less as he progressed.
- Jerome initially translated the OT from the Septuagint, but then realized it need to be done from the Hebrew, so he started over. After about fifteen years, he finished a fresh translation from the Hebrew.
- As he explained in his preface, Jerome insisted that the Apocrypha did not belong in the Bible because the number of the Hebrew books was only 22. Despite his protestations, however, the Apocrypha preserved in its Old Latin form, was added.
 - Though Jerome's translation underwent many revisions in the Middle Ages after him (resulting in a great deal of textual corruption), the Latin Vulgate served as the Bible of the church for a thousand years, enshrined as the authoritative Bible for the catholic Church by papal bull in 1592 (Clement VIII).

The Word Became... English

- The Wycliffe Bible

- The first English edition of the Bible sprung from the end-of life-efforts of Oxford scholar John Wycliffe. Wycliffe emerged as a champion of the people among controversy regarding papal oppression. “No man,” said Wycliffe, “was so rude a scholar but that he might learn the words of the Gospel according to his simplicity.”

- The Wycliffe Bible was published in two editions, one between 1380-1384 and the other in 1495-1496 after John Wycliffe’s death; both versions are likely attributable to his secretary, John Purvey, and not Wycliffe himself. It is the second edition that gained popularity as the “Wycliffe Bible.”

- Despite being the first English Bible, it suffered from being a translation of the Latin Vulgate, and not a translation from the Greek and Hebrew.

The Word Became... English

- The Tyndale Bible

- Rightfully considered the father of the English Bible, William Tyndale came to Cambridge to study (likely under Erasmus who came in 1511) and lamented that the English Bible being used was not translated from the original texts. It became his chief goal to create such a translation.

- Tyndale finished his translation of the New Testament around 1517, but due to his association with Martin Luther and Reformation ideals, had to flee to Worms, where eventually his printing was completed. In 1526, the first copies were smuggled back into England early and purchased with excitement.
 - Sadly, Tyndale lived much of his life on the run and was eventually betrayed in 1535 by his apparent friend, Henry Phillips. Tyndale's condemnation of King Henry VIII's annulment didn't help, either. Tyndale would eventually be strangled to death while tied to the stake and then his body burned—he started, but did not finish, translation of the OT.

The Word Became... English

- Tyndale’s last words were reported to be “Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes.” Within four years, four English translations were published in England, including King Henry’s “Great Bible.” Ironically, all of them were based on Tyndale’s work.
- To William Tyndale we owe some of the most memorable English words in the Bible including: “love” instead of “charity,” “repentance” instead of “penance,” “Passover,” “scapegoat,” “mercy seat and “long-suffering.”
 - Additionally, Tyndale is responsible for phrases such as “the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” “salt of the earth,” “daily bread,” “meek and lowly in heart,” “only begotten son” and “in whom we live and move and have our being.”